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A Story.

BY

MARK LEMON,

AUTHOR OF "WAIT FOR THE END," ETC.

"Not at first sight, nor with a dribbing shot,
Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed;
But known worth did in tract of time proceed,
Till by degrees it had full conquest got.
I saw and liked, I liked but loved not;
I loved, but did not straight what love decreed."

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| WE ARE TAKEN TO HILLTOWN—PUT UP AT THE “WHITE HORSE”—AND VISIT ASHTREE FARM ON A SOLEMN OCCASION | 1 |

CHAPTER II.

| | |
|---|----|
| WE ARE INTRODUCED AT OLD COURT, AND LEARN WHO LIVES THERE.—MR. SELWYN AND HIS NEPHEWS TAKE THEIR PLACE IN OUR STORY | 30 |
|---|----|

CHAPTER III.

| | |
|---|----|
| JACOB SELWYN GIVES INSTRUCTIONS FOR HIS WILL, AND, HAVING SIGNED IT, DIES IN PEACE; BUT ASHTREE FARM-HOUSE HAS HAUNTED CHAMBERS | 56 |
|---|----|

CHAPTER IV.

| | |
|---|----|
| KATE WYCHERLY'S BIRTH-DAY.—THE LEGEND OF OLD COURT.—JIM PERKS WALKS THE ROAD TO RUIN . . | 85 |
|---|----|

CHAPTER V.

| | |
|--|-----|
| THE HOME IN SUBURBAN SQUARE.—BUSINESS IN THE CITY WITH PHILCHER AND CO., AND A PLEASANT DRIVE TO HOLLY LODGE | 110 |
|--|-----|

CHAPTER VI.

| | |
|---|-----|
| THE HUNT BREAKFAST AT OLD COURT.—SOMETHING ABOUT THE RUN, WHICH ENDED WITH DINNER AT THE “ROSEBUSH” | 132 |
|---|-----|

Jim no Ray 139651 Thurf 305

CHAPTER VII.

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| THE FROST, AND WHAT CAME OF IT AT OLD COURT AND THE ROSEBUSH INN | 154 |

CHAPTER VIII.

| | |
|---|-----|
| VISIT TO A VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER AND WHO HE PROVED TO BE.—HOW CECIL CAME TO REMAIN AT THE “ROSEBUSH” | 178 |
|---|-----|

CHAPTER IX.

| | |
|---|-----|
| MR. HARTLEY DISPLAYS HIS PARENTAL SOLICITUDE IN AN EXTRAORDINARY MANNER, AND JIM PERKS MAKES PREPARATION FOR GOING TO AMERICA | 201 |
|---|-----|

CHAPTER X.

| | |
|--|-----|
| WYCHERLY IS SCHOOLED BY KATE, AND PROVES HIMSELF NO WISER THAN HE OUGHT TO BE.—CECIL LOSES HIS NURSE | 227 |
|--|-----|

CHAPTER XI.

| | |
|---|-----|
| JIM PERKS RESOLVES TO GO INTO EXILE AND MR. GARRETT AIDS HIM TO EFFECT HIS OBJECT.—A LITTLE DINNER AND A LITTLE MUSIC | 248 |
|---|-----|

CHAPTER XII.

| | |
|---|-----|
| CECIL GAINS AN INSIGHT INTO HIS FATHER'S MODE OF DOING BUSINESS, AND AFTERWARDS MAKES A VOYAGE TO AMERICA | 266 |
|---|-----|

LOVED AT LAST.

CHAPTER I.

WE ARE TAKEN TO HILLTOWN—PUT UP AT THE
“ WHITE HORSE ”—AND VISIT ASHTREE FARM
ON A SOLEMN OCCASION.

COLD, dull Hilltown deserves to have a place in these pages for divers reasons. Time-worn and irregular, it rests on an eminence overlooking, on either side, broad valleys studded with homesteads and other farm buildings, the broad plains irrigated by a bright river and sparkling brooks. In one direction the background of hills is studded with large patches of forest trees, and when the sun sets behind them in fiery splendour, plain and upland are thrown into strong

shadow. As the twilight deepens into night, the lights in many a far-off window gleam out bright and cheerily, shining as welcome landmarks to the late sojourners in Hilltown, who have found the attractions of the "White Horse" on market nights more than usually seductive.

Hilltown has legends of past importance, and the old Court-House, now used as a grocer's warehouse, reminds some of the grey headed inhabitants of the time when the assizes were held therein, and when the old town was awake from morn till eve for a whole fortnight together. Now, it only rouses itself on market days, or at election times, but continues, somehow or the other, to maintain its place in the country with respectability and honour. There is an old college for poor men and women, founded—it is recorded over the principal entrance—by Queen Elizabeth, when on a visit to Hilltown; and the memory of this royal visit and its consequent benefaction has done much to keep the place from despondency and greater degeneration.

The Reform Bill of 1832, however, swept away

its Borough dignities, its corporation soon following the right to return two members to Parliament, and the Great House—Old Court it was called—passed out of the category of mansions, and became the dwelling-house of a substantial yeoman, who bought a portion of the estate when it ceased to be valued for the political influence which it conferred.

Old Court had been formerly a moated house, and though the great ditch remained filled with clear running water, it was crossed by a stone bridge on one side, and allowed to flow forth on another, thus forming a lake of some extent, and adding greatly to the beauty of the situation. We shall have to revisit Old Court in the course of our story, and therefore will not linger now, as our present business is at the “White Horse,” in Hilltown.

The Widow Mereweather had been long in possession of the most popular hostelry in the dull old town, and whatever of mirth and good fellowship occurred there was generally to be found in her well-ordered parlour, especially on

market days, when a substantial and well-cooked dinner attracted the neighbouring farmers after the business of the day was done. Jacob Selwyn usually took the chair on such occasions, and never neglected the widow's interests, keeping the bottle and the glass in active circulation, though rarely exceeding the bounds of Market-day moderation.

Jacob Selwyn was a clever man, although not much of a scholar, but he was allowed to be the best judge in the county of cattle, of which he reared some and bought more. He also stood high as a valuer of timber and land, and was, moreover, a fair dealing man, never haggling over a bargain, but giving market value when it was asked of him.

It was not only on market days that Jacob Selwyn patronised the "White Horse," as he would sometimes make a supplementary call when business brought him to Hilltown, and it was generally surmised that he remained there occasionally to allow Mrs. Selwyn to expend a stormy temper, by which she was said to be

possessed, before he returned home to Ashtree Farm. Now and then he would invite his two orphan nephews—his sisters' children—to dine or sup with him at the "White Horse," as Mrs. Selwyn was addicted to limited hospitality, especially towards poor relations, except in the instance of her own nephew, whom she had quartered upon her husband's purse, urging in support of her liberality that the boy had been named Jacob Selwyn Hartley after his uncle, as a sort of benevolent condescension on the part of his parents, Jacob and his wife being childless.

One of Jacob's nephews, Jeffery Garrett, was an apprentice to a draper in Hilltown, to whose business it was rumoured he was likely to succeed. The conditions of his trade (dealing as he did principally with feminine requirements), combined with a very simple nature, rendered Jeffery a quiet, unobtrusive character, and one strongly in contrast to his cousin, Peter Masham, who carried on, under the control of his father's executors, a small brewery in Hilltown. It is therefore hardly

surprising that when Masham had once made up his mind to prefer his suit to pretty Hester Mereweather, whatever partiality the lady might have entertained for Jeffery Garrett was instantly extinguished. Hester was a buxom girl of nineteen or twenty, and free from any of the diffidence which sometimes oppresses young women of that age, as her constant intercourse with her mother's guests had given her confidence. Not that Hester was a bold girl, or displayed anything in her conduct to which exception could be taken, beyond that want of refinement and diffidence which constitute the great charms of maidenhood to most young men. Peter Masham, however, was not one to value such qualities, and Hester's ready answer and saucy look won his admiration first, and then his love, until he resolved to make a formal proposal to become her suitor, whenever he could muster courage to ask his uncle's consent, utterly disregarding all consideration for his cousin, Jeffery, who showed, by loss of appetite and a distracted manner, that he suspected how matters were going on at the "White Horse," and

that his chance was out with the blooming Hester.

The owner and occupier of Old Court, Mr. Wycherly, was occasionally the chairman of the market dinner; but, being a gentleman farmer, there was always a reserve when he was present, and much more wine and liquor drunk, as was usually the case on those days when conversation was restricted and the guests left to their own reflections and an increased consumption of tobacco. When he passed away, and was succeeded by his nephew, Jacob Selwyn was less frequently deposed than during the elder Wycherly's lifetime, as the new possessor of Old Court was even less of the farmer and more of the gentleman than his father had been, for he employed a bailiff; and the restraint was not lessened when, some few years afterwards, he married a parson's daughter, from whom, however, he was destined soon to be separated by death, after she had given birth to a daughter. This circumstance for a time probably rendered his intercourse with his neighbours less cordial and frequent than it might otherwise have

become ; and Mr. Wycherly, of Old Court, was therefore only distantly known to those who made up the middle world of Hilltown and its neighbourhood. The poor and needy, however, knew him well, and he was always ready to do a neighbourly turn, either in word or deed, to any one who sought his assistance or advice.

It was after a pleasant evening spent at the market table that Jacob Selwyn, riding homewards,—the moon shining brightly and the wind singing drowsily in the trees,—had his pleasant thoughts disturbed by the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the hard road, and the speedy arrival of a man whom he recognised as one of his own farm-servants.

“What's the matter, Tom?” said Jacob, looking instinctively in the direction of his homestead.

“Nothing on fire?”

“No, master,” replied the man, “not so bad as that ;—missus is in a fit.”

“A fit?”

“Yes, sur ; at leastways we thinks it is,” answered Tom. “She's been ranting about the

kitchen like a good 'un ever since the clock struck ten on 'em, acos you wasn't comed home, till at last she sot herself down on the settle in the fireplace, and went red in the face, quite foaming at the mouth, and spacheless."

"Ride on for the doctor," said Jacob, setting spurs to his horse, for, despite Mrs. Selwyn's faults of temper, he was sincerely attached to his wife.

Leaving the horse to take care of itself in the straw-yard, Jacob hastened into the house, and was shocked to find Mrs. Selwyn lying almost exhausted upon the floor, her head supported by pillows, and attended by the domestics.

"What is the matter, Sarah?" said Jacob, bending over her affectionately. "What has happened?"

The woman could only shake her head to and fro, and breathe heavily.

"Please, sir," said one of the maids, "missus was a going-on——"

* "I know, I know," interrupted Jacob. "One of you get some brandy and a teaspoon."

"No!" ejaculated the prostrate woman, the utterance of the monosyllable apparently exhausting her.

"But you must take something, Sarah, or you will sink before the doctor comes," said Jacob.

"I shan't! and I don't want a doctor!" replied Mrs. Selwyn, with great effort.

"Nonsense, my dear," said Jacob. "You have scarcely any pulse, and your hands are as cold as stone."

"Well they may be," answered Mrs. Selwyn, "sitting up till this time of night." Each word was punctuated with a gasp.

"Now, my dear, don't think of that just now. Quiet yourself, Sarah, pray do ——"

"I shan't!"

"At least, for the present," added Jacob.

The presence of her husband had evidently acted as a stimulant to Mrs. Selwyn, and she continued to jerk out her reproaches despite the deprecatory look of Jacob.

"This is all your doings, sir — stopping out

guzzling and gorging—spending money and health—wasting your substance at home and abroad—swilling spirits and water at Hilltown—burning fire and candle at home—and ” (a gig was heard to drive up to the door) “ sending for a doctor—as I won’t see.”

“ Sarah, my dear,” said Jacob, “ I insist upon your seeing the doctor—now don’t ! don’t agitate yourself !—but if what you have said be true, I’ll have him in, in self-defence.”

Mrs. Selwyn knew when Jacob was determined to be master, so closing her eyes and mouth firmly, her face assumed a look of puckered defiance. Mr. Gregory, the principal Hilltown practitioner, was no stranger to Mrs. Selwyn’s peculiarity of temper, having attended her when she had broken her arm by a fall from her husband’s gig ; and though her case had been conducted with much skill, he had received only rudeness and incivility from his patient. The bandages were too tight, the splints were no use, the medicine was ditch-water, and the reasonable charges, gross imposition. Mrs. Selwyn was one of

those thankless persons who look upon a doctor as one who exists only by the misfortunes and sufferings of others, and whom it is their bounden duty to undervalue when his ability and experience have removed their ailments. His broken rest, long rides or drives through darkness, rain, and snow, and searching winds, are counted as nothing. His earnest watchings of every phase of varying disease, his noble courage, which faces contagion in all its dreadful forms; his patient bearing towards all, and the exercise of skill and knowledge acquired by years of study and astute observation, are disregarded by too many, and would go unrewarded if the doctor could feed off the chameleon's dish, and would be content to do so. Mr. Gregory was not disturbed, therefore, when he found his patient perversely silent, and he was obliged to form his diagnosis of her case from what the servants had told him and his own observation.

"Some internal injury has occurred," said Mr. Gregory, "and great care must be taken in removing Mrs. Selwyn to her room."

"Nothing of the sort," muttered the obstinate woman; but her oppressed breathing gave assurance of the doctor's accuracy.

"Now, Mrs. Selwyn, listen to me," said Mr. Gregory: "be sure that I tell you the truth. Unless you keep yourself free from excitement, and allow of the treatment I prescribe, you will be answerable for your own death. Don't attempt to reply, but submit, like a sensible woman, and a few days may possibly restore you to better health."

Mr. Gregory's manner was so calm, and the tone of his voice so impressive, that his patient believed in her danger, and permitted herself to be conveyed to her bed, from which she was never to rise again a hale woman.

The more alarming symptoms of her disorder were subdued in a few days, but she continued to be confined to her chamber, and used her convalescence in a manner which accorded with her previous mode of discharging her conjugal duty to Jacob her husband.

"Jacob Selwyn," she said one day, when she

was permitted to sit up in the great dimity-covered chair by her bedside, "Jacob, you are the cause of all this; your selfish bad conduct has reduced me to my present condition, and I beg of you never to forget it."

Jacob could not plead guilty to this grave accusation in his heart, but fearing to increase her malady by contradiction, he remained silent.

"For years and years," continued the invalid, "I have borne with a great deal from you, and I only wonder why I slaved and saved as I have done, when I knew how you guzzled and guttled away from home, as though your money was dirt."

Jacob thought to himself that he had worked hardly and honestly enough for what he had spent and gathered together, and his conscience remained at rest, and his tongue continued silent.

"I have talked and talked to you often enough, Jacob"—Quite true, enough and too much, Jacob could have said—"I have even got myself an ill name among friends and servants on account of my temper being so tried by you, Jacob; and if

I am never to go down stairs again but in my coffin, you will be answerable for my death."

Jacob could not endure this, so he said, quite gently however, "Sarah, dear, don't say that."

"But I do, and I will, Jacob; and don't you hasten my end by contradicting me."

Jacob said he would not.

"But you do, and it is simply brutal of you to do so." Mrs. Selwyn paused; but whether to recover her equanimity, or to provoke Jacob to reply, he could not guess. "Now, Jacob," she continued, at length, "I look to you to make me some amends for what you have done. I shall not take any refusal, so don't make any; what I require you to do you must promise me solemnly you will see performed. You do promise, I suppose?"

Jacob mildly requested to be informed of her wishes, and then he would reply.

"I thought as much!" said the impracticable woman. "I thought you would presume upon my condition, and shuffle out of doing what I am sure is your duty, and the only compensation you

can make me for all you have made me suffer, Jacob Selwyn."

Jacob became alarmed, as a deep flush stole into the sick woman's face, and her breathing became difficult ; therefore, without regarding himself any longer, he promised to do whatever she might require of him.

" Very well, Jacob ; that's no more than right, and your conscience will be less troublesome for consenting to listen to me for once in your life. I've known for some time, though you never told me so, that you are continually stuffing and cossetting those two nephews of yours up at Hill-town." He had told her of one of his little dinner-parties, and been reminded of it at all seasons for years afterwards. " Now I am not going to have that any more, unless others have their share. There's *my* nephew to be thought of, Jacob ; my poor sister's fatherless boy " (he was five-and-twenty), " who was named after you, having the ugly name of Jacob given to him, and all to do honour to you."

Jacob was not a dull man, ordinarily ; but, for

the life of him, he could not discover how he had been honoured by this baptismal condescension.

“That boy must be yours, Jacob. I have looked to his schooling and his clothing and his keep up to this time, and I have put him out to a trade and set him up in business as soon as he was ready for it. You must make as much of him as of those other fellows, Jeffery and Peter, who had no right to have been left orphans so early, and live on us as they have done. You must push him forward in life while you are alive, and not wait till your money is of no use to yourself before you part with it. You understand me now, Jacob, and you promise to do as I say, and then I will forgive you—if I can.”

Jacob had contributed so long to the support of Jacob Selwyn Hartley, and had always intended to have helped the young man onward, that he readily gave the required promise, in the hope that if the days of his wife were numbered they might be passed in peace.

Jacob was never more mistaken in his life; for so long as strength was left to her, did Mrs.

Selwyn continue to accuse him of being the cause of her suffering, and only promising him her forgiveness on the conditions aforesaid.

There was silence at last in the sick woman's chamber, but Ashtree Farm seemed less like home to Jacob Selwyn when the silence came. She had been his first love, the sharer of his early struggles, in which he would have been beaten down again and again but for the counsels she had given and the courage she had inspired. He could not bear the loneliness of the old bed-room, nor the old memories which everything about it brought back to him in the silent night-time: it was saddening enough to be where other memories were in the broad daylight; and so, after some vain attempts to overcome this weakness, he had the room closed up, and occupied another chamber, where he had formerly kept his books and papers.

Other changes came about Ashtree Farm, which gave evidence that the departed housewife had been as busy with her hands as with her tongue. The flowers and green plants which used to adorn the lower windows were soon wanting

altogether, or had become leafless twigs. The best parlour, as the state-room was called, had that oppressive and tomb-like smell which pervades chambers long closed or rarely put to hospitable or common uses. One or two of the window-blinds were awry, and the untrimmed creepers in the front of the house flapped with every wind against the glass, as though to denounce the accumulation of dirt within and without. Dust gathered upon shelves and ledges where none had accumulated for years before ; and here and there were evidences of slatternly disorder which would have disquieted the ghost of the tidy woman, had it been permitted for a "certain term to walk the night" through the house of Ashtree Farm. The simple flowers which grew under the windows and at the sides of the grass-grown gravel-walk leading to the summer-house, and which a friendly hand once trimmed and watered, soon grew intermixed with weeds, or perished for the want of care.

Jacob might now and then be seen walking about "the place," apparently indifferent to all these changes for the worse which had followed

the loss of his wife ; but he noted them all, without the heart to stay or lessen them. It is God's good providence that we should sooner forget the sorrows than the pleasures of our lives, and Jacob soon ceased to remember the bitter words, the angry railing of his departed Sarah, and recalled only her wifely care for him and his substance.

After a time he resolved to do her justice now that she could no longer speak for herself, and he took advantage of a quiet evening with Mr. Wycherly to put this good resolution into practice.

Having expressed his wishes to Wycherly, and begged of him to draw up a proper form of inscription to be placed over his departed wife, he went on to say,—

“Her name was Sarah—simply Sarah,” as though the fact was a testimony to the modest nature of the departed. “She was of late years sixty-eight,” he continued, referring at the same time to an old pocket-book ; “but according to my reckoning we lost three years or so from not keeping a check upon her birthdays. But put her down at sixty-eight, as she must

have known her own age better than anybody else."

Mr. Wycherly wrote, "aged sixty-eight."

"Would you say 'aged'?" asked Selwyn. "I don't think she would have liked that. Say in her sixty-eighth year, if you please."

Mr. Wycherly wrote as he was requested.

"She was an excellent cook, Wycherly, and made hams—you know her hams—better, I think, than any woman in the county," said Selwyn, with a pardonable feeling of pride.

"I don't think we can put that into her epitaph," remarked Wycherly.

"No, no, perhaps not; but it's a pity, it ought to go down, as it might have stimulated other young women to have as much said of them," said Selwyn; adding, after a pause, "she was good at figures, and taught me to cipher when we was first married; but that can't go down either, I suppose. She was a very tidy woman, and made others tidy—broke in a lot of good servants, who never had a kind word to say for her, I dare say; that can't go down, I suppose?"

"It would be difficult to express it," answered Wycherly.

"Pickling and preserving—she was a great hand at both," said Selwyn, with an inquiring look, but receiving no encouraging response from his amanuensis, he took another shot. "Always early with her chickens and turkeys, and pretty nigh found herself in clothes out of the eggs. What do you say to that? That ought to go down?"

Mr. Wycherly thus appealed to, replied, "Well, I think all the good qualities which you have enumerated, Selwyn, must be comprised in, 'She was an excellent wife.'"

"Ah! that she was!" said the bereaved husband; "and it's hard she can't have it put stronger than that. She was affectionate, Wycherly."

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Sometimes rather too affectionate, and showed a little unnecessary anxiety about me. I used to vex her sometimes on purpose just to try her temper."

“And how did you find it?” said Wycherly, slyly.

“Well, it varied; sometimes smooth enough, at other times warm—perhaps very warm; but as her good qualities can’t be set out at length, I won’t have her little infirmities advertised in the churchyard.”

The result of this conference was seen in Hilltown churchyard shortly after in the form of a neat white rail, on which was inscribed, in fair black letters, a list of virtues which those who had known the woman living never suspected her to possess; and Mr. Wycherly had smiled more than once as he wrote them down from poor Jacob’s dictation, who testified to the sincerity of his belief and sorrow by his broken voice and tearful eyes.

Jacob was quite alone in his tribulation. His two nephews disliked their aunt, and, with the honesty of youthful natures, had never taken any care to conceal the feeling, except in their uncle’s presence, when they saw, with surprise, how much her loss affected him, whilst the one for whom

she had been so mindful found immediate consolation in the prospective good which she had secured for him. Had Jacob foreseen the consequences that were to follow the fulfilment of his promise to his dead wife, he would have regarded his obligation almost like a compact with the Evil One.

Oddly enough, Mrs. Selwyn died on a market-day, and the news of her demise was announced and received at the "White Horse" in a manner not at all complimentary to the defunct lady, Jacob being frequently alluded to as a man more to be congratulated than condoled with. As the evening waxed late, and the conversation became more general, it was nearly determined to present him with a testimonial, but the motion broke down, as a division of opinion existed as to the form it should take—some being for a *papier-mâché* tea tray for Jacob, whilst others were clamorous for a tombstone for Mrs. Selwyn, the inscription thereon to be drawn up by her neighbours.

One consequence of Mrs. Selwyn's retirement

from the stage of life was soon the talk of Hill-town. About a fortnight after his uncle's bereavement, Mr. Peter Masham had paid him a visit at Ashtree Farm, and from that time Mr. Peter had deserted the public parlour of the "White Horse," and had taken up his position in the snug little room at the back of the bar, where he might frequently be seen by those tall and curious enough to peep over the Venetian blinds intended to screen the occupants of the snuggerly from observation, sitting very lovingly by the side of Miss Hester Mereweather. That these love passages were with the full consent of the worthy hostess of the "White Horse," became evident on the following Sunday, when Peter, having escorted the young lady to church, sat in the same pew with her, and afterwards conducting her home, remained to dinner.

Jeffery Garrett saw all this with burning eyes and throbbing brain, and read his own fate in what he saw. Whither he fled, until ten o'clock that night, nobody knew. How he found his way home again he could not tell. His dream of

love (which had been for some time more like a nightmare) was crushed, he said to a fellow-apprentice; his young hopes were calcined, and his general existence so blighted, that he should never flower again. Lovers are inclined to mix their metaphors.

In the course of time, Jacob resumed his place at the market table, and became also a more frequent caller at the "White Horse," feeling it was, he said, a sort of home to him, now that Peter was Hester's accepted sweetheart, and the young girl, partly from her good nature, and partly to gratify one to whom her future husband was so largely indebted, "cossetted" Jacob in so many ways, amongst others, admitting him into the sanctuary of the snuggery, that the gossips of Hilltown took into their wise heads to prognosticate that Widow Mereweather might ride her "White Horse" to Ashtree Farm whenever she pleased. No! no! good gossips. Though Jacob loved and mourned his departed grey mare, he was too wise a man not to have profited by experience, and dull and cheerless as his old

paradise had become, he never intended to enliven it by introducing another Eve.

Ashtree Farmhouse was destined, however, to put on a cheerful and bustling appearance for a whole week, when its chambers were swept and garnished, and every chimney reeked with smoke airing rooms, or preparing the bridal feast for Peter and Hester's wedding. Even the long-neglected garden was made trim again, and the vagrant creepers, vines, jessamines, climbing rose-trees, and clematis, were brought into order. And again long-closed windows opened to the fresh air.

Cartloads—yes, cartloads of good things from the stores of the “White Horse” continued to arrive up to the very morning of the wedding, which was as merry as though the walls of the farm-house had never had within them an aching head, or had had their traditional ears offended by an angry word. The Hilltown band made the kitchen rafters tremble again, so stimulating was the strong ale and the other good cheer freely administered to all. The old parlour floors danced

in unison with the nimble feet above them, as though their oaken planks rejoiced at feeling another tread than the heavy foot of sorrowful Jacob, though indeed it had been seldom enough that he had visited them since the great change came upon the house. Even Jeffery Garrett succumbed to the general mirthfulness after he had gone through a pantomime of "the maniac" in the barn, and restored himself to reason by punching his own head for being envious, uncharitable, and unthankful. He returned to the house with his hair in such disorder that his head resembled a Turk's-head broom, and was seen perpetually bobbing about for the rest of the evening, whatever the dance, although he had never been known to have been saltatory before, and was now under obligation to each of his partners for comfort and guidance during his various performances.

Uncle Jacob bore himself bravely so long as the young couple were of the party, even when the widow's "customary tears" flowed freely, as the post chaise, inscribed "Mary Mereweather, Hilltown,"

drove away with the happy pair. As the drops of maternal joy would continue to trickle down her plump cheek, Jacob dried them up in her smiles, by giving the widow the heartiest kiss her full red lips had known since weeds had mingled with her orange blossoms. Then Jacob stole away to an old covert of a summer-house, until he was unearthed by two old cronies who discovered him by the wreaths of tobacco smoke which he was blowing forth to quiet his beating heart, and to hide the visions of other days, which rose before him full of tenderness and love, though painted by his own rude fancy.

CHAPTER II.

WE ARE INTRODUCED AT OLD COURT, AND LEARN WHO LIVES THERE—MR. SELWYN AND HIS NEPHEWS TAKE THEIR PLACE IN OUR STORY.

THERE was another house in the neighbourhood of Hilltown, besides Ashtree Farm, where the shadow of death lingered long after the destroyer had done his work. Old Court had been made too happy by the presence of Mrs. Wycherly not to suffer by her removal, although she left behind her an angel in the house, to comfort him who had loved her long and truly. The courtship of Herbert Wycherly and Catherine Gray had extended over some years, as Herbert, until he had succeeded to his uncle's property, had been scarcely in a position to marry. The young couple would have trusted in each other, and worked out their future, could Catherine have

consented to leave her father to finish his pilgrimage alone. When the time came that her filial cares were ended, with what bright hopes was she welcomed as the mistress of Old Court ; and though her life was to end there so soon, she and Herbert lived in a most happy future, which their love and their contentedness created for them. Herbert Wycherly was a man of strong feeling and somewhat imperious temper, and he appeared at times to resent, as it were, the sorrow which had overtaken him. Then it was that the reproving angel spake to him by his infant daughter's voice, and chided him by her pretty looks for his want of thankfulness that Heaven had not claimed all that was its own at once, but had left him some one to love and cherish with all the affection of his bruised heart.

As time wore on, Wycherly would sometimes consider the propriety of his marrying again ; but when he looked around to find a fitting helpmate, the old love was too strong to be supplanted, and he could discover none other to take his Catherine's place in heart or home. He was fortunate,

moreover, in an introduction to a lady and her daughter who had accepted the direction of his household affairs together with the care and education of his daughter Kate. Perhaps also he would have sooner become reconciled to his loss, and put aside his sorrow, had he not been a comparative stranger to his neighbours. He occasionally joined the hunt or a shooting party, but as it was apparent he did not seek for companionship, nothing more than the usual commonplace courtesies passed between Wycherly and his acquaintances.

Jacob Selwyn was more intimate at Old Court than any other person, and he had conceived the greatest regard for Wycherly's character and judgment. He often sought his neighbour's opinion on affairs of business. Having been long accustomed to discuss such matters with his sharp-witted wife, Selwyn appeared to be afraid of running alone, and occasionally they made joint ventures, which, to the credit of their mutual foresight, usually turned out to be very profitable.

When Jacob came to reflect—sometimes by

day and sometimes by night—on the promise he had made to his defunct Sarah, he would become somewhat apprehensive that he was hardly keeping his word to that best of wives now that she was silent, and that 'it was his duty' to take more interest than he had hithertoe done in the worldly prosperity of Jacob Selwyn Hartley, who had, by the bye, paid him more than one visit, and opened anew the closing wounds in the old man's heart, by his strong expressions of love and admiration for his deceased aunt and benefactress.

The frequent recurrence of these self-examinations and self-reproachings became rather troublesome to Jacob at last, and after smoking many pipes in the old summerhouse—thus holding counsel, as it were, with his invisible and inaudible helpmate of former days—he projected a scheme for a just discharge of his obligation, which he determined to put into immediate execution, provided it met with Mr. Wycherly's approval.

As all Jacob's nephews were to be benefited by this notable scheme, and as its operation will have much to do with this story, we will proceed

at once to ascertain the positions of the young men at the time when their uncle had taken them into his thoughts and was preparing to discharge what he considered to be his duty to the dead wife.

Jacob Selwyn Hartley is entitled to precedence not only on account of his seniority, being some nine years the elder of the cousins, but for other reasons to be hereafter developed. There is a class of traders in London, and possibly in other large commercial cities, whose speciality is not particularised in the Directory, although the names of those who exercise the calling may be found there under various designations. They are known amongst themselves and others as "buyers of job lots," and are no doubt very useful members of the commercial community, when their honesty is proof against the temptations around them. They buy for ready money any superfluities of stock which other traders may have to sell, and of course at prices much below the original market value, and this proceeding would be fair enough, did not dishonest people,

whose credit is better than their principles, avail themselves of these convenient marts, where ready money is to be had and no questions asked, to defraud their confiding creditors, and do injury incalculable to many a fair dealer. There are [strange stories extant of job buyers' doings—of mysterious bargains—of bales on bales of goods diverted from their supposed destination by such dishonest facilities, and of immense fortunes realised, bringing, in some cases, only remorse to the successful rogues. To the principal of such an establishment had Master J. S. Hartley been apprenticed, and in due time, by his aunt's agency and his uncle's money—Jacob's honestly earned money—admitted a junior partner. He was well qualified for the business.

He had also gone into another partnership, of which he had not thought it prudent to inform his aunt, knowing how she had protested against such undertakings, unless there were good pecuniary reasons to apologise for the act. Mr. Hartley had clandestinely united himself to a pretty, gentle creature, with just soul enough to love

submissively any bolder spirit which demanded her admiration. Jacob had married her after a brief courtship, partly because her prettiness pleased him, and partly because he laboured under misapprehension of her expectations. He had been told that she was entitled to a thousand pounds or more on the death of a lady aged seventy-six ; but the reversionary interest proved to belong to a cousin of the same name. Mr. Hartley never forgave his wife the mistake he had made, but converted it into a moral weapon, which he frequently used with marital severity. Poor thing ! she certainly had not tumbled on a conjugal couch

“ whose roughest part
Was but the crumpling of the roses.”

She found there abundance of thorns, and her manifold sufferings changed many of her weaknesses into virtues.

Mr. Hartley's quiver had begun to fill before his aunt's death, and a fine boy, Cecil, and two fragile girls, had been added to his household.

Peter Masham, the son of Mr. Selwyn's elder

sister, had succeeded to his inheritance of a small brewery, where he and his buxom wife Hester lived merrily enough, spending their gains quite as fast as they made them. They were both young, however, and time might bring prudence ; so Mrs. Mereweather chided very gently at first, and let them alone altogether after awhile, as she, finding the bar-parlour of the " White Horse " rather lonely when her daughter had married, gave her hand very unexpectedly to the exciseman of the district, and found she had enough to do to restrain his convivial tendencies and his passion for horse-flesh.

As for Jeffery Garrett, poor fellow, he succeeded, by help from his uncle, to his old master's drapery business, and pursued the even tenor of his way very unobtrusively. It was fortunate for Jeffery that there was no rival establishment in Hilltown, or he might have been less prosperous, as it was quite evident that the fashions outran him, and there were exhibited in his windows more " lots at reduced prices " than would have been advantageous to the profit side of his year's balance.

Whatever small ambition to make his way in the world he had possessed, had been crushed out of him by Hester Mereweather, and he cared little whether a paper of pins or a silk dress were required by a customer.

There was another nephew of Jacob Selwyn—a brother of Peter Masham, and who, being a lad of an adventurous spirit, had turned his back upon Hilltown, and gone to India, under the patronage of a former member for the defunct borough. His name was Philip.

Mr. Wycherly was lying on the lawn in his garden, having been engaged to perform the part of a gee-gee to his little daughter Kate, when Jacob Selwyn arrived at Old Court, full of the grand scheme which had occupied his mind for several days past. The evening sun lighted up the broad latticed windows of the old house, until it seemed like a golden palace, and, as the merry laughter of the child mingled with her father's voice, Jacob paused before he disturbed them, and then contrasted, in his rude way, the cheerful look of Old Court, and the living mirth he found

there, with the tristfulness of Ashtree Farm, and the depressing silence which haunted it night and day.

The child was the first to perceive Jacob, and, opening her large dark eyes until she recognised him, waved about her plump hands, as though to give him welcome, for Jacob was as great a favourite with little Kate as he was with her father.

Jacob soon had the child in his arms, and as he kissed her rosy cheeks and looked into her happy face, he little foreboded how much of her after life was to be affected by the business which had brought him to Old Court that calm summer's evening.

"Just in time for our gossip-water," said Wycherly; "for I hear the urn fizzing yonder, and here comes Miss Meriton for you, Katey."

The petted child at first made some faint show of resistance, and clung to the neck of Jacob; but it was soon evident that the young lady who had approached them was too much loved by her little charge to permit of any long-continued disobedience; and well, indeed, was it for the

motherless Kate that Providence had sent her such friends as Mrs. Meriton and her daughter. They were teaching a brave example, fitting her for the life which was before her, and wherein much would be required of her that none could have foreboded, not even those who now watched her with such love and tenderness.

As the evening advanced, Wycherly and Jacob were seated at the open window of a small room, looking out upon the lake which had been formed by an outlet from the moat once surrounding Old Court. The smoke from their pipes stole gently out into the air, and then darted away in companionship with the soft breeze blowing from the water. There had come a few moments' pause in the conversation, and Jacob began to emit the smoke from his lips in quicker puffs, as though his mind were not so composed as it should have been, to have rendered perfect his enjoyment of the nicotian weed. He was evidently in the throes of some revelation, as he had coughed two or three times, gasped slightly, resumed his pipe, and gasped again.

“What’s the matter, Jacob?” said Wycherly, after a pause. “What are you thinking about?”

“To own the truth, Wycherly,” replied Jacob, “I have come here this evening to break a matter to you, and I hardly know how to begin.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; the fact is, I’m afraid you’ll think me a fool for what I have had in my mind for some time,” said Jacob, pausing abruptly.

“I can’t say whether I agree with you or not unless you tell me your thoughts,” replied Wycherly, laughing.

“No; that’s true enough,” continued Jacob; “So here goes. You didn’t know much of my wife—the late Mrs. Selwyn? You did not, I believe?”

“I did not—only by report,” added Wycherly, seeing that Jacob looked at him earnestly.

“Ah, and report, I know, hadn’t much to say in her favour,” said Jacob; “but report was always a liar from the beginning, you know, and Sally didn’t deserve one-half that was said of her.

She had rather a hasty temper, I own, and was very persevering in argument ; but, being generally in the right, she was not called upon to give in."

" You forget, Jacob, that I wrote her epitaph from your dictation," said Wycherly, with a faint smile.

" Yes—you did—and I've a great mind to have the rail made wider, and add ever so many more good qualities, which ought to have gone down to her account—managing servants among them—for the contrary hussies nearly drive me distracted."

Jacob was clearly endeavouring to come to the point, but Wycherly had to wait patiently whilst Jacob jerked out another dozen whiffs of smoke, and said :

" Well, Wycherly, just before she died—when you would have thought any other woman would have been thinking only of herself and her——backslidings, she sent for me to her bedside, where she was sitting in the big dimity chair."

Jacob paused again.

Wycherly took his hand, and said, " Jacob, I

have had my trials also—I have had such another parting.”

“No—no, my dear fellow, I don’t think you have,” replied Jacob, returning his friend’s pressure of the hand. “For Sarah insisted—I mean requested—that is, she made me promise solemnly, that I would adopt, as it were, a nephew of hers—a sister’s child, who was christened after me for some unaccountable reason—and in fact provide for him.”

“And you promised to do so, I presume,” said Wycherly.

“Well—yes, I did, under rather powerful pressure from Sarah. I have not done much as yet to redeem my word, and I don’t feel quite easy in consequence. Now, this is what I have been thinking of doing. There are my own nephews, Peter and Jerry—good young fellows enough, and struggling to make a place in the world. I am getting too old—too tired for business—and I think I shall give up the old place, and be quiet for the rest of my days.”

Here Jacob mixed himself a glass of spirits

and water, and refilled his pipe, performing each operation so deliberately that Wycherly might have fairly inferred that Jacob intended to take up his rest at Old Court, the more so, as he added :

“ Well, we’ll consider that done. Now for what you will perhaps consider the foolish part of my scheme. I am worth, say, about eight thousand pounds, more or less : now, I’ve four nephews, including Philip in India, and the nephew of Sally’s that I have as good as adopted. I have thought, therefore, that a little help, now the young people want it, will be worth more than a deal when I am gone, and I shall have the satisfaction of seeing my money doing its good whilst I live, and know that no one is wishing me in the churchyard, for what they can get when I am there.”

“ Surely,” said Wycherly, greatly surprised at what he had heard : “ surely you do not intend to give each of these young men two thousand pounds ? ”

“ No, Wycherly,” replied Jacob, blowing out the

smoke now in one long and graceful cloud—"no, I do not intend to give them the money at present. I propose to lend them by degrees, as they can employ it advantageously in their business, taking their bonds for the sums I advance, and so, I trust, making them more careful of their means than most people are over windfalls."

"And for yourself?" asked Wycherly.

"O, I have a few hundreds at the Bank; I shall have the interest of the bonds; and I shall retain Philip's share: he is doing very well in India, and don't need help; and I shall make him residuary legatee, so that he will have no cause to grumble when I am gone. Now, what do you say? Am I an old fool, or am I doing a proper thing, seeing I have none to care for besides the boys?"

"What do I say?" exclaimed Wycherly, again taking his old friend by the hand;—"that you are acting benevolently, wisely, as you are placed. The young fellows, I hope, will prove worthy of such a kind and thoughtful benefactor, and

never give you cause to regret the confidence you place in them."

And then the two friends sat late into the night devising how Jacob Selwyn's scheme for keeping his promise to his wife could be carried into execution.

As Jacob rode home in the bright moonlight, he felt there was a new life before him, not to be employed in making careful gains, but in distributing those which he had acquired by patient, honest industry, to secure happiness to himself and others. When he reached Ashtree Farm, and saw his old house clothed in silver light, he again contrasted it with what he had seen at Old Court, and a feeling of peace stole over him as he laid down that night, full of grateful thankfulness.

Jacob soon put his good intentions into execution, with one reservation, however. He could not bring himself to part with Ashtree Farm, for, somehow or the other, it was no longer so dull and dreary as it had been, and he began to find pleasure in restoring the neglected garden to its

former neatness, and, after a while, to sit in the old parlour, and recall old times. He then began to invite old friends and his young relatives to simple hospitalities, until, in the course of time, he laid his Sally's ghost in every chamber of the house.

Peter Masham pushed his business with great energy, and many of the outlying public-houses were ornamented with striking sign boards, announcing that "Masham's fine ales" were sold within. Even the "White Horse" grew proud of the connection, and declared the same fact in letters a foot long. Mrs. Masham, however, was not so satisfied with this increasing prosperity as might have been supposed—Peter in search of business, being often out late from home, returning very frequently under other influences than his own honest beverages. But Peter promised that it should be only for a short time, until the business was well established, when he would sin no more. He was bound to do the best with uncle's money.

As for Jerry Garrett, he awoke amazingly for a

time. He mounted a plate glass front, and named his house "The Emporium of Fashion," doing little however to invite that ever-changing goddess to take up her abode there, and, after a time, more dust, more flies, more "lots at reduced prices" declared that Jerry had collapsed into his normal hibernal condition, and that Fortune as well as Fashion was equally at odds with him.

Not so Mr. Selwyn Hartley, as that gentleman chose to be designated, out of respect, he said, to his dear departed aunt and his kind living uncle ; he seemed to have fascinated the blind goddess in some way, and to have obtained the loan of her cornucopia, at least, if all the stories of his gains which he told at Ashtree Farm were true ones. As his opportunities of making advantageous bargains occurred very frequently, he soon contrived to get the larger portion of his share of his uncle's advances into his possession, and he also managed the confession of his marriage so adroitly that it turned rather to his advantage than to his confusion. He had discovered that his uncle's weak point was the late Mrs. Selwyn.

“My dear aunt,” he said, “knew of my marriage, and indeed urged it upon me. She had her peculiarities, as you know, and I never could understand why she desired me to keep it a secret from every one, even from you, sir. With me her word was ever law, and I never presumed to disobey her.”

Well, Jacob thought, Selwyn Hartley was not singular in that particular. Her word had been law to Jacob, and *he* never or rarely disobeyed her.

“When she heard of the cruel deception which had been practised upon me,” said Hartley, “in regard to the reversionary interest, she wrote me the most tender and affectionate letter, promising therein, that if her life should be spared she would make me amends for the loss I had sustained.”

“And she has done so,” said Jacob.

“Amplly, sir, amplly !” exclaimed Hartley. “To have bequeathed me to your care is to have replaced my loss a hundred-fold, I am sure, sir ; and though I have now four children, with in-

creasing prospects, I am sure, by your generous assistance, to secure in a few years an independence for myself and for them."

Jacob believed all that the wily Hartley told him, and listened with interest to the stories of his mercantile successes, regretting, when he gave him the last £500 of his share of the money to be advanced, that he had not more to offer to one who could employ it so advantageously,—one who must, at no distant day, take his place among the "merchant princes of London"—a favourite phrase with Mr. Selwyn Hartley.

Nor were the young gentleman's visits discontinued, even when there appeared no further immediate advantages to be gained by continuing them, and Jacob did not fail to notice this. Hartley had made himself useful to his uncle in getting certain moneys transferred or sold out, and had had the several bonds given by his cousins prepared as they were required, thus saving his uncle much trouble in matters of business with which he was not very conversant, and which his imperfect education had rendered

distasteful to him. Thus, in the course of a few years, Selwyn Hartley became Jacob's man of business in a limited sense, and his uncle was grateful for his services, to be rewarded in time to come, as good and evil deeds are often recompensed even in the world of the present.

There was little intercourse between Hartley and his cousins, but he became, by some mysterious means, acquainted with all their shortcomings, and generally contrived—no doubt to stimulate them to better courses—to convey the knowledge he had obtained to their uncle, urging him, in the tenderest way, to remonstrate with the delinquents, until Jacob became rather a bore to his nephews in Hilltown, and though no positive rupture occurred between them, the same cordiality ceased to exist as formerly distinguished their intercourse. Peter Masham continued to push business and thrive, to all appearance, and Jerry only claimed his uncle's assistance when he could not do without it.

As time wore on there was a change also for the better at Old Court. Sunlight was in every

room, and music sweeter than the songs of birds to Wycherly's ear was heard there from morn till night, and he began to bear into the outer world some of the sunshine of his home, whilst his own voice had much of the home music in it. For the baby Kate had grown into a lively intelligent girl, and the widowed father saw in her face and in her winning manner a constant resemblance to her beloved mother.

Mrs. Meriton and her daughter had nobly done their ministerings to the child, and her affectionate nature repaid them with a love which made their service a most pleasurable duty. Little Kate soon became a popular pet with every one, as she rode about on her pony, which was led by Jim Perks, the best scholar in the free school; and those who hesitated to court an intimacy with the father, indulged in many a pleasant chat with the good-tempered child. Almost the only frequent playfellow of Kate was Peter Masham's daughter Ruth, who was about two years her junior; and the intimacy thus formed lasted throughout their future lives, and was destined

to have a strange influence on the happiness of both.

Ruth Masham was a great favourite with Mr. Wycherly. She was a pretty, gentle creature, who seemed to regard her more intelligent play-fellow with a deference which children often exhibit towards each other ; and Kate, who knew her superiority—as children will discover—sometimes used her power very despotically. Dolls had to be surrendered without a murmur, orders executed with dispatch, and inferior parts taken in all the extemporised domestic dramas which were enacted in the garden or the nursery.

Mr. Wycherly noticed all this, and, though he loved little Ruth for her submissiveness to his little darling, he saw also with regret that his own seclusion, if continued, would be adverse to the interests of his daughter, debarring her from the society of other children, which goes so far in making the happiness of the young, if it does not in most cases assist in the formation or development of their characters. He therefore resolved to seek friends

among his neighbours ; and, as the home influences of which we have spoken had been communicated to himself, he found the task—the duty—easy of accomplishment. The hunting-field gave him abundant opportunities of introduction to his fellow-yeomen, and his evident desire to abandon the reserve which had kept them apart met with ready recognition, and in the course of a year or two there was not a more popular man ten miles round Hilltown than Herbert Wycherly of Old Court. All was not well with him, however, for he continued to nurse the silent sorrow for the loss he had sustained by the death of his wife until at times he gave signs of relapsing into his former exclusiveness. Then Mrs. Meriton or her good daughter would encourage little Kate to display her many winning ways until the unconscious father was cheated into forgetfulness, and made to be thankful for the blessings which remained to him.

How Kate Wycherly was to learn that the influence which she possessed over her father was to be exercised as her paramount duty, and how

she performed it at the sacrifice of the happiness of nearly half her life, we have yet to know.

The story-teller's quill, like the magician's wand, is potent only by permission of superior agencies, and we must wait patiently the coming of events, having shown their shadows.

CHAPTER III.

JACOB SELWYN GIVES INSTRUCTIONS FOR HIS WILL, AND, HAVING SIGNED IT, DIES IN PEACE ; BUT ASHTREE FARM-HOUSE HAS HAUNTED CHAMBERS.

JACOB SELWYN was a clear-headed man enough, and clever in his way ; but he had his weaknesses, and one of them was an undefinable objection to making his will. Jacob was not singular in this, as many persons of his position in life are reluctant to perform such an easy duty, and thereby avoid bequeathing to their inheritors ill blood and litigation. Jacob would walk under a ladder, or sit down thirteen at the market table, but he never cared to enter upon any important business on a Friday, or make his will at any time. It was needful to be done, however, as he felt his strength failing him, and other unmis-

takable indications that his life was waning fast, daily reminded him to set his house in order before he departed on the long journey which has no return. He was ashamed to confess to his friend Wycherly that he had so long neglected to make this prudent preparation for the future, and he therefore determined to entrust the matter to his nephew Hartley, with the necessary instructions for securing the fulfilment of his generous intentions to his young relatives.

“It has always been my determination, Selwyn,” he said, “to leave to you and Peter and Jerry the money which I have lent you from time to time, and I have thought it better, now and then, to have put all your bonds in the fire and so made an end of them.”

Why did Hartley’s face grow deadly pale, and then change into a fiery red, at this simple statement of his uncle Jacob?

“But then I’ve thought,” continued the old man, “that if I did so, you might forget that you had had your shares, and blame me for leaving what I have left to your cousin Philip in India,

who was a dear sister's son as well as Peter and Jerry——”

“ You are quite right, sir,” interrupted Hartley, “ quite right ; we might have been ungrateful enough to have done so. Spent gold is soon forgotten, sir——”

“ But mine, I trust, is not spent,” said Jacob ; “ I hope it is doing the good I intended it should do——”

“ No doubt of it, sir,” again interrupted Hartley. “ I am sure it has done so with me ; and if I, with five little ones ” (his quiver contained that number of arrows now), “ have contrived to save, sir, others, with less incumbrances, no doubt have done better.”

“ Five children ! ” echoed Jacob ; “ have you so many ? ”

“ I have, sir ; delicate plants most of them, requiring careful and expensive nursing, and constant medical attendance.” He paused, and looked tenderly at his uncle, then adding, “ All bear Selwyn as their second name, sir.”

Jacob gave a short cough, and then said, rather

sharply, "But you are very prosperous—so you have told me—and should be thankful that so many blessings have come into your house. I might have been happier at one time had only one child been bestowed upon me. It might have made your aunt's life better—happier also."

Whatever Hartley's object had been in calling attention to his domestic census, it had evidently awakened no feeling of condolence in the breast of the prospective testator. Indeed Uncle Jacob appeared to regard children as positive advantages, and might take them into account; it was, therefore, necessary to say something.

"I *am* grateful, sir; *very* grateful that Mrs. Hartley is what we may call 'a mother in Israel'—expensive as the position is—costly, I may say; education, the great blessing of our era, is attainable for money; and clothing, though greatly reduced in price, can only be realised for cash. Still, sir, I am grateful; and though the name of Hartley may perish—four of my blossoms are girls—the name of Selwyn will be preserved for the next generation at least. And now, sir,

shall I take your instructions?" said Hartley, preparing to write.

The testator's instructions were soon given and written down. The bonds were to be cancelled ; a few small legacies to old friends and the servants in the house at the time of death ; his silver testimonial cup—presented by the farmers meeting at the market table of the " White Horse"—to Mr. Wycherly, his executor ; the best china tea-set to Miss Kate ; and the residue to Philip Masham, then away in India. Hartley recapitulated his memoranda in the most cheerful voice, and his manner altogether was of the airiest. Half an hour later he was seen walking in the most secluded part of the garden, with a thoughtful brow and a downcast look, plotting, doubtless, some clever scheme which was to make him rich as Dives, and more wretched than Lazarus hereafter.

There is need of haste if Selwyn Hartley has any designs upon his uncle Jacob, for the old man has sickened suddenly, and, as his old servant Susan said, " was breaking fast." Selwyn Hartley

was a good man of business, and let no grass grow beneath his feet when the way led to his own advantage; and he was to be benefited, was he not? by having his bonds cancelled by his uncle's will.

It was nearly dark when Hartley arrived from London with his uncle's last testament. There was no one in the house but old Susan and Jim Perks, who had come over from Old Court to make inquiries as to the state of the invalid. Jim was now a fine young man, and employed as under-keeper to Mr. Wycherly, having preferred the keeper's lodge to the stable, where Miss Kate no longer required him as her master of horse. He was, according to custom at Ashtree Farm, regaling himself with food of some kind and a jug of strong ale, when Mr. Hartley drove up; and, as there was no one about the place at the moment to take the horse to the stable, Jim offered his services. Selwyn Hartley walked with him into the yard, apparently thinking of other matters than his tired horse, which had evidently been driven long and fast.

"You don't belong to the Farm?" he said at length.

"No, sir," replied Jim; "I live at Old Court, and ha' come to know how Master Selwyn be to-day."

"Can you write your name?" asked Hartley, abruptly, after a short pause.

"O yes, sir," replied Jim, with a self-satisfied smile; "and, more than that, sir, I can read and write almost anything."

"Then don't go away just yet: I shall want you to witness a paper which Mr. Selwyn has to sign; and—" he paused, and taking a half-crown from his pocket, gave it to Jim, "you needn't mention the matter at Old Court—unless you please."

Hartley went into the house. Jim Perks, as he removed the harness and fed the tired horse, wondered why he had received half-a-crown not to say he had written his name at Ashtree Farm when he got back to Old Court—"unless he pleased."

When Jim returned to the kitchen, which he

did much sooner than he would have done had Mr. Hartley not excited his curiosity, he found that Susan had been asked the same question as to her calligraphic capacity, but had received no money—at least she kept her own counsel if she had been rewarded for her scholarship.

Jacob Selwyn had become very weak—very weak indeed—during the last few days, and it was with great effort that he could follow with his dim eyes and his clouding mind the words and purport of the paper which he read by the light of a candle at his bedside. By that paper he cancelled his nephews' bonds, gave a few small legacies to old friends and the servants in his house at the time of his death, his silver cup to Wycherly, and his old china to Miss Kate, and bequeathed the residue of his estate to Philip Masham, then away in India.

He would hardly have mastered the meaning of what he had read, had not Hartley perused aloud the rough draft of the will. It now needed only the signatures of Jacob and the necessary witnesses to become the act and deed which

disposed of his worldly possessions. Hartley took the paper and went to the door to summon Jim Perks and Susan, and was more surprised than gratified to find them on the landing outside the bed-room door. Susan, a dull woman, had misunderstood something Hartley had said to her about "being in the way," and so she had gone up stairs and invited Perks to follow her. Mr. Hartley said nothing, however, although he looked angry enough, but the business in hand no doubt kept him silent. With some difficulty Jacob signed the paper, making a great blot at the end of his name, and then Susan and Jim Perks signed also. When all this was over, Mr. Hartley said in a low voice, "I hope this will be as satisfactory to others, uncle, as it must be to me."

"I trust so, too," replied Jacob, evidently surprised at the remark : "why should it not be so?"

"Certainly there is no proper reason why you should not do as you like with your property," said Hartley ; "but I am not a blood relation as your other nephews are, and they may think I am taking what is their right."

Jacob could only shake his head to and fro, and murmur: "No, no—good lads always—kind lads;" and then he appeared to fall into a doze.

When Jim Perks had mounted his rough pony to return to Old Court, he was rather surprised to find Mr. Hartley waiting in the road outside the farm gate.

"Stop a moment, Perks," said Hartley. "You heard what passed between Mr. Selwyn and me after the will was signed, did you not?"

"O yes, sir," replied Jim, "every word."

"Very well: you may some day perhaps be called upon to remember the exact words. If I were you I would write them down to-night before I slept—word for word, you know. Good-night;" and Mr. Hartley placed another half-crown in the hand of Jim Perks.

Jim wondered why he was being so well paid for such easy work, and as he rode along he thought—"What can Mr. Hartley be dreamin' about to make him so free with his money?"

No doubt Jacob Selwyn was "breaking fast," although Mr. Hartley declared that he was evi-

dently stronger—so much stronger, indeed, that he should go to London, and would return again in a fortnight. Therefore, having locked up the will in the *bureau* which stood in his uncle's bed-room, and given Mr. Selwyn the key, he took his departure.

The doctor, however, was of a different opinion, and told Mr. Wycherly that a few days—a week at the most—would see an end of Jacob. Mr. Wycherly, therefore, called daily upon his old friend, and during one of his visits learned that all worldly matters were arranged, and that he had been appointed executor. The doctor's prognostication was correct, and Peter and Jeffery were summoned to Jacob's bedside to take a long farewell of the kind man who had cared so much for them. Jacob was too weak to speak—too weak to raise his hand—but he seemed to regard them affectionately with his eyes until he closed them for ever, passing away as a faint murmur which sounded like "Sally" escaped his lips.

Selwyn Hartley was written to immediately, but no reply was received until the day before the

funeral, when a letter came announcing that Mr. Hartley had been called suddenly to the Continent, and no one knew with certainty where a communication would reach him. The funeral, therefore, had to take place without Selwyn Hartley.

Hilltown was not a progressive place, and had not established a hearse; therefore, as Ashtree Farm was nearly three miles from the church, Jacob had to be conveyed to his resting-place, according to the custom of the country, in one of his own waggons, newly painted for the occasion. The mourners, dressed in their ordinary attire, came in every variety of one-horse conveyance to pay their last mark of respect to their deceased friend, their profuse hat-bands streaming in the wind, or muffling the faces of the wearers, as it was gusty weather when Jacob died. To one accustomed to the uniformity of city funerals the effect would have been the reverse of impressive; but those who had known Jacob Selwyn as a good neighbour and a just man saw nothing of the incongruous in the rude

procession, but regarded the exhibition of respect in its true meaning, and sympathised accordingly. As Mr. Hartley's return was uncertain, Mr. Wycherly advised that the will should be opened on the day following the funeral, and those interested being assembled, the *bureau* was unlocked and the will produced. It was carefully enveloped and sealed, and Mr. Wycherly, as executor, being requested to act as reader, removed the outer covering.

The principal signature was that of Jacob Selwyn, blot and all, and the witnesses were James Perks and Susan Hobbs. The paper set out in due form that it was the last will and testament of Jacob Selwyn, and duly bequeathed small legacies to sundry old friends, the silver cup to Mr. Wycherly as a token of the testator's esteem, and the old china to Miss Kate. As Susan Hobbs had received a gift of £100 the preceding Christmas, Jacob bequeathed her nothing more. So far the will realised and satisfied the expectations of all.

What followed was perfectly incomprehensible.

The paper set forth that the testator had advanced at various times certain sums of money to his three nephews, Jacob Selwyn Hartley, Peter Masham, and Jeffery Garrett, and for which they had given their respective bonds. These bonds (but without any interest which might be due at the time of his decease) the testator now bequeathed to Jacob Selwyn Hartley, in consideration of his valuable and constant services rendered to the said testator during the last seven years, and also in consideration of his bearing the name of the said testator, and in accordance with a solemn promise made to his late wife Sarah on her death-bed.

Great was the consternation created by this unlooked-for disposal of Jacob's wealth. Mr. Wycherly threw down the will upon the table and declared his disbelief in the genuineness of the document. He had been consulted years ago, when Jacob first thought of advancing money to his nephews, and he was sure that Jacob would have then made it a gift but for certain prudential considerations. Yet there, staring them all in

the face in incontrovertible black and white, was Jacob's revocation of his intended benevolence, and the interest of only one nephew considered.

Jim Perks was sent for ; Susan was ordered into the room, and questioned as to her signature and that of her dead master. Susan had no doubt—no misgiving of any kind—as to the genuineness of both. She remembered the great blot which master made after signing, and when Jim Perks arrived he remembered it also.

“ Was anything said at the time ? ” asked Wycherly.

“ Yes ; there were two or three things said ; ” and Jim repeated the conversation which took place ; — how Mr. Hartley feared that others wouldn't be satisfied, and that they would think that, as he was not a blood relation, he was taking the rights of others, whatever they were. Jim and Susan were sent out of the room almost angrily by Mr. Wycherly.

“ What could it mean ? What could be done ? ”

No one could answer.

Mr. Wycherly talked for some time of disputing

the will, but after-reflection convinced him that there was nothing to justify such a course. The signatures were acknowledged to be genuine, and there was an end of the testamentary hopes of Peter Masham and Jeffery Garrett.

When Mr. Wycherly resumed reading, and found that Philip Masham was residuary legatee, he resolved to accept the office of executor, a position which he had declared he would not assume when he had first read the conditions of the will.

A month passed without the appearance of Mr. Jacob Selwyn Hartley, but he had written more than once from some obscure place in France, expressing his confidence that all that was necessary would be done, and in conformity with his uncle's will. Mr. Wycherly foreboded a storm from this treacherous calm, and his foresight did him credit.

Preparations were being made for the sale of Ashtree Farm and all thereto pertaining, and Jim Perks had been put into the house to keep old Susan company, when late one evening a gig was

driven up to the gate, and Jim recognised the voice of Mr. Hartley bawling to be admitted.

Mr. Harley was very cold from his drive, and therefore very uncommunicative, and it required more than two stiff glasses of brandy-and-water and the whole front of the kitchen fire to thaw him sufficiently to announce his intention of sleeping at the Farm, and his desire to have a fire lighted in his bedroom as soon as some eggs and bacon were prepared for his supper. He gave these orders at brief intervals, as though his mind were occupied by other thoughts than creature comforts. If he were thinking of his dead uncle, or his own large accession of wealth, he did not let a word escape his lips which could have indicated the direction of his cogitations.

Having eaten his supper very rapidly, as men in thought generally do eat, he drank another very stiff glass of grog, and proceeded with a somewhat unsteady step up-stairs. Susan had offered to light him to his chamber, but when they came to the door of the room in which Jacob

Selwyn had died, Hartley took the candle from the old woman, and, bidding her a curt "Good-night," waited until she had reached the bottom of the stairs before he entered in. His eyes went instantly to the bed on which his uncle had died ; but nothing was lying there but the palliasse covered with a white cloth. With a quick step he crossed the floor, and opening a cupboard in an angle of the room, lifted from it a small iron box, in which he knew he should find his own and his cousins' bonds. Then, from a secret drawer in the *bureau*, he produced a key which opened the little safe. Having removed the papers contained in the box, and placed them in the pocket of his coat, he returned key and box to their respective places. He knew that he was alone in the room, and that neither Susan nor Jim Perks could be watching him ; but he did all that has been described rapidly, furtively, and with a trembling hand. He glanced once more at the white cloth on his uncle's bed as he left the room, and having locked the door and reached his own chamber, he heaved a deep sigh, as though relieved of some

oppressive feeling. Perhaps he remembered that he was about to lie down to sleep where his aunt Sally had breathed her last ; but he could not have slept, he felt, in the room he had just quitted.

He partly undressed himself, and then sat down before the fire ; but the wood was green, or the chimney was damp from long disuse, and the embers burned with a dull, sullen glow. He had often slept in that room before, and he looked about it as though to see if any change had been made in it. No ; the old sampler, worked sixty-one years ago by **Sarah Artley**, hung over the fire-place : the fingers were dust and bones now which had traced those letters and figures, those queer birds and strange little houses. The great oak clothes-press was in its accustomed place, and the red moreen curtain hung before the door which opened inwards on a landing connected with the servants' sleeping-rooms. How often had that passage rung with the shrill tones of the excellent housewife, the late Mrs. Selwyn, when the kitchen clock had struck five and Susan was not astir. There was the oval dressing-glass in its painted

frame, which had reflected so often his aunt Sally's face, from the time when it was a comely picture, bright and fresh from Nature's easel, until it became cracked and rumpled by years added to many home-made vexations.

But the night was cold, and Hartley was sitting in his shirt-sleeves before a dull fire, so he left off thinking of the past and went to bed. He could not sleep, however; and as he lay looking out into the dark he saw, as it were, a great fiery eye gleam upon him from the red curtain.

"Who's there?" cried Hartley, starting up.

"Only me, sir," replied Jim Perks, drawing aside the curtain; and then closing the door quickly behind him, he placed the candle which he carried upon the dressing-table.

Why was Hartley silent? Why did he not demand the reason for this intrusion? Why did his heart beat quickly, as though a sudden fear had come upon him?

"I ask pardon, Mr. Hartley," said Jim, "for coming in so unawares; but I did not like to knock, in case Susan should have heard me, and I

knew you had only just gone to bed ; I heard you moving about."

"Well, what do you want with me at this time of night?" asked Hartley, his heart still beating quickly.

"May I sit down, sir?" asked Jim.

"Yes."

Jim drew up the large dimity-covered chair in which Mrs. Selwyn sat when she made Jacob promise to care for the man now lying upon her bed, breathing almost as painfully as she had breathed at that time, knowing almost what his untimely visitor was about to say to him, yet wondering how he had obtained the knowledge of the wicked thing which he, Jacob Selwyn Hartley, had done so cleverly.

"Mr. Hartley," said Jim, after a pause, "I think you once said to Susan in my hearing, that some one—we cannot say who, perhaps—helps them as helps themselves. Now, sir, I think I've got a chance of doing that for myself, and I fancy you haven't forgot your own text, and have done likewise."

"Yes, he knows all, or suspects all," Hartley thought ; so he kept silent.

"I have heard, sir," continued Jim, "that Master Selwyn—your uncle by Mrs. Selwyn's side—has left you nigh all he had."

"No, not by a great deal," said Hartley, somewhat relieved, he knew not wherefore.

"Well, some'ut is set by for his nephew in Indy, but you have got a bonny share of the old gentleman's leavings. You're to have, so I hear, all the money as was lent to Mr. Masham and Mr. Garrett. Isn't it so, sir?" asked Jim, rather pertly.

"Yes ; it was so left in the will you saw signed," said Hartley, with effort.

"Yes—I hear so." Jim paused. "I saw my handwriting to the paper, and the queer some'ut which old Susan calls her name ; and Mr. Selwyn's hand was to it also, and the great blot he made, if you remember ; and finely Mr. Wycherly has rated me for not telling him what I had done at the time ; but you gave me five shillings to be quiet, you know, Mr. Hartley."

"No, not to be quiet : I cared nothing about it ; I gave you the money for your trouble," replied Hartley.

"You gave me the money to be quiet, sir !" said Jim, pausing between every word, "and you set me a-thinking often why you did so ; and I could never guess why until I heard that you was to come into so much, and that Mr. Masham and Mr. Garrett was to have nought of their uncle's leavings."

Hartley discerned mischief in Jim's voice and looks, so he asked boldly : "Well, and what have you guessed ?"

"I guess that you and me had better be friends, Mr. Hartley. Had Mr. Wycherly been more civil to me than he has been of late, I might have thought different ; but when I see that he cares nought for me—not so much as he does for the horse he rides or the hound he hunts with,—though I have been a good servant, and tended to Miss Kate more like a slave than a Christian, why, he's made me think of myself and nobody else, and that's why I've come here to-night."

"The sooner you make your business known the better, then," said Hartley, "as I want to go to sleep."

"I don't think you will when you have heard me," replied Jim, rising and going to the door by which he had entered. He opened it softly, and seeing no one in the passage, closed it again. "We have been talking rather loud, sir, and I have reason to know that sounds can be heard through deal wainscotin'."

Jim, then, in a whisper almost, communicated to Hartley the reasons he had for solving the problem of the half-crowns. They were simple enough, and might as well be written down at once, if there were not a pleasure in guessing.

Some of the consequences of that night's conference between Jim and Mr. Hartley may, however, be recorded.

Jim certainly had more money at command shortly afterwards than he could receive as under-keeper, and he became disposed to be insolent to his superior fellow-servants, and at last to Mr Wycherly, who, speaking (as was his wont) rather

sharply to Jim on some neglected duty, the under-keeper resigned his gun and licence, and went away to London. Occasionally he came down to Hilltown and flashed about his money, treating and drinking with the most disreputable fellows in the neighbourhood, giving assurance that he had gone to the bad in the country, whatever his mode of life was in the great metropolis. His prosperous debauchery did not continue, however, above a year or two, and Jim Perks returned to his native place a broken man—broken in health, character, and fortune. Down he went lower and lower in the little community of Hilltown, until the beershop and the skittle-ground were his constant resort, and his means of livelihood became of very questionable acquirement. Now and then, when he has been in great distress, Miss Wycherly had sent him money and clothes, although her father had forbidden him to come near Old Court, and always spoke of him as an ungrateful poaching vagabond. So well deserving was he of this character, that we should have left him to his fate; but as he will turn up now and

then in the course of our story, it seemed advisable to say thus much of his biography.

Mr. Selwyn Hartley made a very indifferent breakfast next morning, and his loss of appetite he attributed to the bad fire of the preceding night, and the wretched quality of the brandy supplied by the "White Horse." He had had a night-mare and slept very little, he said. A night-mare truly; and Jim Perks, who rode it, could have told what an uneasy goer she had been, and what grief they had come to. As Mr. Hartley could not eat, he put on his hat and coat and took a turn in the garden, more grass-grown now than it had ever been, even when it was in mourning for Mrs. Selwyn.

"I never could see much in a garden at any time," mused Hartley; "nothing but time and money wasted over a few flowers that you can buy in Covent Garden Market for a shilling, and dear at the price. But this affair is perfectly disgusting and depressing to one's spirits. I've a good mind to drive over to Mr. Wycherly and ask when he means to sell the farm."

It was quite as well for Mr. Hartley's peace of mind, that he did not carry that intention any further, as Mr. Wycherly no sooner heard of his presence at Ashtree Farm than he despatched a short note to old Susan, requesting her to inform Mr. Hartley that he had no right to be upon the property, and to request he would remove himself to Hilltown, or a more distant locality.

Susan gave the note to Mr. Hartley to read, and as he did not wish, he said, to have any unpleasant altercation with Mr. Wycherly or his cousins Peter and Jerry at Hilltown, he resolved, out of respect to his uncle's memory, to depart in peace from Ashtree Farm for London.

Mr. Hartley adequately avenged himself for this indignity by pressing payment of the bonds with the greatest urgency as soon as Mr. Wycherly had exhausted all legal procrastination in discharging his duty as an executor. Mr. Hartley was very patient under this ungenerous treatment, as he called it, and even Mr. Wycherly thought at one time that fair terms might be obtained, if not some redistribution of the property, more in ac-

cordance with Mr. Selwyn's previously expressed intentions.

These anticipations were soon dispelled by Mr Hartley.

"Had he been treated with more friendly consideration," he said, "he should not have pressed his claims upon his cousins with any severity." As it was, he drove poor Peter Masham to the verge of bankruptcy; and then poor Peter "pushed business" so vigorously, that he drank away his health until he died, leaving his widow and child almost penniless. Not friendless also, for Providence brought about them many kind hearts, as we shall learn as time progresses.

As for Jerry Garrett, he put up his shutters at once, only taking them down again to exhibit nothing but "lots at reduced prices," and then sold himself off without reserve for the benefit of his creditors, though not for his own, as it was known that after he had paid twenty shillings in the pound to every one, he had, with only fifty pounds in his pocket, left Hilltown. For a time,

however, none knew in what direction he had fled from trouble.

Poor Jerry! He had only himself to care for in the wide world, and he felt that a very little corner would hide him.

CHAPTER IV.

KATE WYCHERLY'S BIRTHDAY.—THE LEGEND OF
OLD COURT.—JIM PERKS WALKS THE ROAD
TO RUIN.

AN April morning as bright and warm as early summer. The woods were still leafless, but the hedgerows were showing signs of returning verdure ; their banks glowing here and there with primroses, intermingled with clusters of wood violets. The very weeds possessed a beauty from the tender green which they displayed, and even the marshy ground was strewn with golden lent-lilies among its tufts of rushes. The sweet-throated song-birds carolled their hymns to the great Giver of the spring ; and those denied the gift of song twittered their thankfulness for the bright sunshine, and the plenty it was creating. The early garden flowers were yielding rich

banquets to the bees, and bright yellow butterflies had burst their winter cerements and commenced their short lives of pleasant rambles. The pear and plum and cherry trees put on their wreaths of snowy blossoms, and amongst them the brigand house-sparrows were busy when released from their domestic cares. The tiny lake at Old Court was alive with matron geese and their motley progeny, and the clucking of anxious pullets was heard ever and anon to recall their wandering chicks, or to proclaim the discovery of luxurious pickings. The measured thud of the flail in the distant homestead was not out of harmony with the peacefulness which was not silence, and the young corn which streaked the furrows with green seemed to proclaim that garnerers must be emptied and barn bays cleared to make room for a coming harvest. That April morning was an anniversary of Kate Wycherly's eighteenth birthday, and seemed to be in accord with all that pertained to her. Her beauty, like the young year, was more due to youth and cheerfulness than to perfect development of feature,

although none could look in her bright face without remarking what quickness of intelligence her dark eyes displayed, or what firmness of character was to be relied upon if Lavater had correctly described her expressive mouth. None could have divined her future who saw her on that April morning, in the midst of some dozen friends who had come to keep holiday with her at Old Court, and who were marshalled on the lawn which stretched down to the margin of the little lake, mounted as rather irregular cavalry preparatory to a campaign to a neighbouring tower, a favourite place with lovers and pic-nickers in and about Hilltown. There were no victims to Dan Cupid, however, in that happy group, and the season was not advanced enough to permit the pic-nick, but the road to the tower lay through pleasant lanes and over a stretch of down whose springy turf made a gallop delightful even to the most timid rider.

Mr. Wycherly was in command, as a matter of course, and when arranging the order of march he stopped suddenly, and exclaimed :

"Kate! Kate, dear! where is Ruth Masham?"

"In the house, papa," was the reply. "I could not persuade her to come, though I have had Merrylegs kept purposely for her to ride."

"Not go! Oh, it will never do to leave her behind." So, riding up to the entrance door he bawled out, "Ruth Masham! Ruth, dear! Come forth immediately, or I shall have to dismount, for go you must, you little bashful puss."

A pretty pale-faced girl, just past sixteen years of age, answered his summons. She was dressed in faded mourning, and presented certainly a great contrast to her more smartly-attired companions. She was the daughter of Peter Masham, and had left a home of sorrow at Kate's earnest pleading, as, strange to say, the losses and changes which had come with Peter's death had made no difference in the friendship of Miss Wycherly for the poor bankrupt's daughter, who had been her earliest, and at one time, her only playmate.

Ruth pleaded that she was not a good rider—indeed she was not.

"Nonsense, my dear girl," said Wycherly, "you

used to ride that vicious shying little brute of your—of a Welsh pony, when you had scarcely the strength of a baby, and I have seen you on Merrylegs twenty times since—this year. Hi! Mary!” calling to one of the servants, “bring down a skirt of Miss Kate’s,—she must have a dozen—and help Miss Masham to put it on; and Tom,” addressing a groom, “bring out Merrylegs; see that his girths are tight; and take up an extra link in his curb-chain.”

Poor Ruth was longing to join the party, but she had fancied that some of the smart young ladies had looked askance at her faded black dress, and remembered why it was so shabby—remembered that her father had died in debt, his life shortened by disreputable courses; and not all Kate’s kind words could reassure her that she was there upon an equality. Ruth’s was a very gentle nature—loving, how loving! timorous, and enduring. Poor child!

Mr. Wycherly’s commands, however, could not be disputed, and in a few minutes Ruth was ready to mount Merrylegs—Kate’s second fa-

vourite—and then — to quote more dignified writers—“the cavalcade set forth on its progress to the tower.”

What merry music their young sweet voices made in the green lanes, startling the birds from the hedges, and sending a sentinel rook caw-cawing away in great trepidation. They were silent on the down, for their delighted horses, feeling the springy turf beneath their feet, would not be restrained, but arching their graceful necks, dashed onward to the pleasant excitation of their riders. The fresh breeze tossed about the long curls of the happy girls, and tinted even Ruth's pale face with the glow of roses. What a glorious scamper over that yielding turf, and through that healthful wind, until they entered Pemberton Wood ; the merry music again scaring the rabbit and the hare crossing the green rides on either side of the main bridle-path, or disturbing the jays chattering on the boughs.

As they came upon the turnpike-road, a carriage with post-horses passed them, and was seen soon afterwards to make for the entrance to Holly

Lodge, a small compact residence, with no great amount of acreage attached to it. It had been untenanted for some time, its former owner going abroad after making himself extremely unpopular with everybody.

“A new neighbour, I suppose,” said Mr. Wycherly. “I heard the Lodge had been let to a Londoner, a Mr. Lockyer, I think. I hope he likes hunting and other field sports, and won’t prove such a curmudgeon as the late tenant, who trapped foxes, locked his gates, and forbade the Master to draw his covers. Such a fellow has no business to live in the country. London’s good enough for him.”

The carriage had stopped, and two men had alighted from it,—a father and son, perhaps.

Did no heart beat more quickly for what the eyes then saw? Did no vague terror steal over more than one in that happy group? No. Happily, the future is hidden from us, or the merry meeting at the Tower would not have been long remembered as one of the happiest days in

other lives than those of Kate Wycherly and her earliest friend, Ruth Masham.

The next day was as bright and warm as that which had preceded it, but there was a cloud over Old Court. Its coming had been foreseen and pondered on, but it was not the less dark for that premonition.

Old Court had been, as we have recorded, a moated house, and might have dated back many years before the time of the Commonwealth, as it was reported to have given refuge to one of the regicides when the hunt was up for all who had taken part in that great tragedy whose actors are only now beginning to be understood and appreciated according to their deservings. There were pannelled rooms and deep bay windows reaching almost to the ground, some of them with latticed panes emblazoned with the arms of departed owners. It was such a house as claims to have many legends associated with it, but one will suffice for our story.

A young husband and a young wife once dwelt at Old Court, loving each other most tenderly.

On an autumn evening they sat together in one of the bay windows, watching a child, tired by play, sleeping in the lady's lap. They talked of the future which they believed was before them, and of the part the child was to play in it, until they pictured her a young maiden—a wife—a mother. They thought of so much happiness that no shade of sorrow stole over the bright picture they had painted, until they seemed to have exhausted the power of words, and became silent with their happiness. But unseen, unfelt, a fiery evil stole in at the opened window, and breathed upon the lady as it passed, and before the night had gone which succeeded this happy evening, a fire was in her veins, which, before many days, dried up the life within her heart, and she laid in her chamber dressed for the grave.

Then for months and months the bereaved husband wandered from chamber to chamber in the old house, and could hardly at times realise the greatness of his sorrow ; but when he did so, his grief made him almost rebellious at his loss. After a time, when his little child would watch

for him at the bay window, and run to meet him in the hall, and draw him by the hand into his house, he often felt deep thankfulness that she had been left to him. As his daughter grew older, she appeared (so he thought) to assume her mother's face and to speak with her mother's voice, and his love grew stronger for the child, and so increased at last that she divided his heart with the one he had mourned so long, until he brought himself to believe that he should better show the sincerity of his love by making his daughter's life as happy as he would have striven to have made the life of her mother. In earnest fulfilment of this fatherly duty, Mr. Wycherly had not been left to work alone. Mrs. Meriton and her daughter Agatha had aided him with their womanly knowledge and devotion; and it was because they had announced their intention of resigning those duties, which they had discharged with such advantage to Wycherly and to Kate, that a cloud was over Old Court on that bright April day.

Mrs. Meriton was the widow of an estimable

man—a naval surgeon—who had died in the discharge of his duty, leaving his wife and child with little more than a small pension to depend upon. Mrs. Meriton had preferred to trust her own exertions, rather than rely upon the uncertain aid of her own or her husband's friends, and had, fortunately for Mr. Wycherly—undertaken the care of his house, and by the aid of her daughter, the education of Kate.

Agatha Meriton was not more than five years the senior of her little pupil, but she possessed the qualities necessary to form an able instructor in a remarkable advance of her years. Firmness, united with great kindness and patience, clearness of exposition and thorough acquaintance with the subjects she undertook to teach—they were limited to English, French, and Music—she succeeded in creating an earnest interest in the mind of her pupil, which made the labour of both a labour of love. The work of the school at an end, Agatha became the cheerful companion of her young pupil; nor was she an unwelcome intruder when Ruth Masham became

a needful accessory, and romps and high jinks were permitted as conducive to health and girlish enjoyment; although she sometimes gently directed the boisterousness of the happy play-fellows "within" the limits of becoming mirth!

As Mrs. Meriton knew by her own sad experience the cause of Mr. Wycherly's frequent musings and disrelish of general society, she wisely employed the engaging agency of the child to solace the father, and so as Kate grew older she became aware of the influence she possessed, and her love became so watchful that Wycherly was rarely left to dwell long upon his great sorrow. Some new display of tenderness, some irresistible witchery of his cheerful, devoted child would chase away his gloomy thoughts and move him at last to seek his place among his neighbours, until Old Court promised to become, as we have said, one of the pleasantest homes in the county. But now the Meritons having completed their allotted task, had declared their departure to be imperative. It was a sad but necessary parting—necessary for the future happiness of Agatha, who with

a self-devotion rarely to be met with even among women, had delayed for nearly two years the acceptance of her share in another home where her early love had found shelter long ago. Could any one—even Kate, who loved them with the affection of child and sister almost, ask them to stay? Could Wycherly, who knew that they had raised up for him the counterpart of the one whom he had lost, when her love and presence had been so needful to his peace and happiness? No, those dear friends must go their appointed way, carrying with them the love and gratitude of those with whom they had tarried, not as strangers, but as most cherished friends. God will bless them, and all such unselfish comforters of the mourner and such loving counsellors of the motherless. Who has needed comfort more than Wycherly? and who may need counsel more than his daughter Kate?

When Kate assumed her position as house-keeper she soon became aware of the gravity of her responsibilities, but the pretty blunders she made were only a source of enjoyment to her

father, and therefore she was not in the least discouraged by her failures. Every day she was more convinced that her father's chief happiness was centred in herself, and the consciousness of this great trust at times imparted a gravity to her character which fitted her for the trials which awaited her. For her father, and for him alone, she resolved to live.

Mr. Wycherly was not insensible of his daughter's devotion, although he had never contemplated the matter as she had regarded it, and he sought by every means in his power to make her life a happy one. He denied her nothing which she desired or which he thought she ought to desire, indeed he seemed to live for her alone also, as she had resolved to live for him, but without the probability of having to make the sacrifices which her resolution might exact from her.

Kate was a capital horsewoman, and her father mounted her so well that she often accompanied him to the field and rode, if not so boldly as some of our cotemporaries, at least as well as a young lady ought to do. She was a great favourite with

the hunt, and might no doubt have led some gallant Nimrod captive once and again, had she shown the least indication that she was to be approached successfully, but though she was a most agreeable young lady to her general acquaintance, she became rather repellant when any marked attention was addressed to her by the young men of her acquaintance. Rural gentlemen are easily discouraged, especially when a young lady is quick witted and somewhat of an adept at administering cold water. Kate Wycherly had her own reasons, as we know, for avoiding any danger to her affections, and she thought it quite possible to confer all the love of her honest nature on her father. But it has been said "Love grows not at our will. It springs up in our hearts like wayside flowers sown by the hand of Heaven."

Upon one subject Kate was very disobedient to her father's command. No, not exactly command, but his very strongly expressed opinion. Wycherly had not forgiven Jim Perks for keeping the share he had had in the preparation of Jacob

Selwyn's will a secret from him, although he never suspected him of any evil complicity with Hartley. He brought himself to consider it a breach of trust, a want of confidence as it were, which was personally offensive. And when Jim left his service and became the scapegrace we have known him, Mr. Wycherly forbade him Old Court, and prophesied that the gaol and he would soon become acquainted. Kate, on the other hand, remembered the kindly lad who had led her pony about the pleasant lanes, and gathered for her flowers and nuts as they went along, and had always been to her the most willing of servants. She believed that he had been led into error by bad companions, and that he would—as he had told her more than once—gladly return to his former honest courses if any one would give him a chance. Kate had mooted the question now and then to her father, but Mr. Wycherly could be very obstinate—he called it being firm—when he had once formed an opinion. Decision, consistency, and firmness are all fine qualities, no question of that, but in the exercise of them good

men sometimes shunt off into pigheadedness and unjustifiable perverseness.

One afternoon Kate was driving her little pony attended only by a lad, such as Jim Perks had been years before, when she saw her former servant leaning listlessly over a gate by the road side. The noise of the wheels made him look up, and when he saw his once kind mistress approaching, his pale cheeks—pale from the past night's debauch—became flushed instantly, proving, Kate thought, that all sense of shame had not died out of him.

He touched his ragged hat, but did not move otherwise.

Kate stopped her pony, and said, "I am sorry to see you idle again, James Perks. You promised me you would try for work."

"And so I have done, miss," replied Jim, looking down upon the ground as though he could not bear to see the bright innocent face which he had once regarded unabashed. "So I have done, miss. I walked until I was foot-sore, but no one would give me a job. I was knowed, they said, and

nobody wanted such as me about their place. So I must starve, I suppose, unless I do as master told me I should—die in a gaol.”

“David, get down and stand by the pony’s head,” said Kate to her attendant,—“and Perks, come you here.” The poor vagabond fellow approached the carriage, his eyes still bent upon the ground.

“Now tell me, James,” said Kate, in a low whisper, “what do you think will be the end of this? What will become of you?”

“God only knows, miss! I see only one end. I can’t be expected to starve; no one will give me work, so I suppose I must——” He paused.

“Steal, you were about to say,” said Kate. “That will lead to the gaol and to punishment of some kind or another.”

“Yes.”

There was so much hopelessness conveyed in that one word—spoken as it was in a voice that came not from the speaker’s throat, but from his heart, that Kate’s pity overcame her recollection of his misconduct, and she said,—

"James Perks, that must not be, if anything can be done for you? Can you suggest nothing?"

Poor Jim paused before he replied.

"If I could get away—if I could get away from this place—I mean from England altogether, and go out to Americky, or the other places where people are going to now, I might have a chance. I'm sure I would try—ay, if I died I would."

"Then why don't you go, James?" asked Kate innocently; but the question seemed so unaccountable to the one to whom it was addressed, that he looked up into her face with eyes of wonder.

"Why don't I go, miss? It costs money,—a power of money, and I haven't the price of a loaf! Clothes, too, some one to speak a good word for me—I have nothing of the sort, miss."

Kate remained silent now that Jim had answered her question. She would gladly have made any personal sacrifice to have helped her old servant; but she reflected that it was her father's money she should have to give, and she knew how badly he thought of "that Jim Perks"

who now stood tattered and torn—ay, and all forlorn, beside her.

“I am sorry almost,” Kate said, “that I asked such a question so inconsiderately, James, and the more so, as I do not think I have the power to help you to what really seems to be your only chance of escape from a life of crime and degradation. But—now mind you must not hope too much from what I am about to say—I will try what can be done with my father’s consent.”

Poor Jim sighed and shook his head when he heard the condition on which help was promised.

“Well, perhaps you are right to think I may not be able to do what I would for you. But I will try nevertheless. Come to Old Court tomorrow. O yes, you may come, as I shall tell my father of what we have now said, although I cannot promise that he will take the same view of your case as I do.” She put a piece of silver money into his hand, and David having resumed his place by her side, drove away, leaving Jim Perks dreaming of better things than a gaol.

He was not, however, to be long in dreamland,

for his name was called by a familiar voice—one which jarred harshly upon his ear, now that his thoughts had been attuned to Kate's kindly words.

“Jim! Jim Perks!”

The man who spoke was in a copse opposite, and his whole appearance was as villanous as it was dirty.

“I seed the young missus tip you, you lucky beggar! Come over here, there's a gap ayond, and we'll wet the money at beer-shop.”

“I ain't going drinking again to-day,” replied Jim. “I'd enough last night to last one to the end of the week, and so had you, Bill.”

“None of your preachments, Mr. Jim; you're alus so precious good after a sermin by her,” rejoined the tempter. “Come! come! just one pint atween us, or I'll peach to Old Wycherly, who likes you like pison.”

Whether Jim thought of trouble to Kate, or whether he was a weak man and fond of beer, he yielded without any further remonstrance, and joined his companion.

The beer-shop was in a lane, and any one in

ignorance of the character of the locality and the proprietor, would have wondered how a living was to be obtained by the sale of beer to the household of the two cottages which stood beside it. The guests indeed were few, but they were the roaring boys of the neighbourhood, fellows who worked but seldom and yet had plenty to spend, thanks to the game laws, which make game stealing such a profitable employment. Men who rob hen-roosts are called thieves, and those who purchase the plunder are stigmatised and punished as receivers of stolen goods. Your game pilferer is called a poacher, and the consumers of his filchings are not ashamed to know that they have paid the wages of sin for the gratification of their appetite. The common thief is shunned by the honest of his own station. The poacher commands a dangerous sympathy and encouragement from those who consider the temptations which full coverts present, preserved only for a few hours' sport in the course of the year, and regard the trespass as venial which puts the price of a few long-tails into a poor man's

pocket. The sooner such false considerations are ended the better for the poor man and the poor man's friends. One poacher in a village does more to demoralise his fellows, to crowd the beer-shop, and in time the union or the hospital, than all the other rustic delinquents, be their peccadilloes what they may. Poacher has money to spend, gotten all guess how; punches any man's head who calls him a thief; and roars himself hoarse singing "The delight of a shiny night In the season of the year." Mr. Legislator, if you would do society a service make him a thief, just make plundering a covert as degrading as robbing a hen-roost. Treat the receivers, whether of eggs, birds, or beasts, as you do the marine store-keeper, when the black doll at his door is indicative of the darkness of his doings within.

The one pint, as proposed by the friend of Jim Perks, became two—and more; the shiny night was sung in full chorus; and Kate's gift went into the beer-shop-keeper's old stocking, which contained his ill-gotten money, and was always kept under his pillow for security.

Kate strove her best that night to interest her father in behalf of the weak, the erring Jim Perks, and it will never be known whether her eloquence—her persuasiveness shook the firmness of her father, but when Mr. Wycherly kissed her before going to bed, he promised to think over the matter by the morning.

The result of his cogitation was not revealed, as the proceedings of Mr. Perks during the night rendered all consideration for his future comfort impossible; and when Dewsbury, the keeper, asked to see Mr. Wycherly at breakfast the next morning, it was to announce that “they had took Ginger Bill and Jim Perks in the Home Wood last night with several wires in their pockets, and a good deal of resistance.”

Kate coloured as her father looked at her, laughing derisively, and puzzled the keeper by saying, “Mr. Perks wanted to emigrate. I’ll do my best to get him a berth on board one of her Majesty’s ships the first time he breaks a hedge-stake over your head, Dewsbury.”

Kate gave up her protégé for a time. Only for

a time, as she was determined *now* to prove to her dear, positive father, that Jim Perks was more sinned against than sinning.

Is there not a fable called the Lion and the Mouse? And is not the moral found when the weaker animal helps the stronger.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOME IN SUBURBAN SQUARE—BUSINESS IN
THE CITY WITH PHILCHER AND CO., AND A
PLEASANT DRIVE TO HOLLY LODGE.

MR. SELWYN HARTLEY had, as we have seen, effectually “sewn up his cousins”—to quote one of his favourite expressions—and had thriven wonderfully well on the money acquired by the process, despite Mr. Wycherly’s prognostications to the contrary. True, the firm of Philcher & Co. had figured rather fishily in more than two or three bankrupts’ accounts, and been compelled to hear themselves accused of being the principal cause of infinitesimal dividends, and much fraudulent trading. But these slanders they outlived and appeared to flourish under oppression—like the chamomile, which improves by being trodden upon. More than one envious (no doubt) rival

warehouseman boldly averred, that their bad reputation was necessary to their success—that some day, they would prove too clever, and find the hand of the law at their throats. Messrs. Philcher & Co. had been known to talk of actions for libel when such rumours had reached their counting-house, but strong, no doubt, in their own respectability, they were magnanimous enough to “treat their maligners with silent contempt.”

To see Mr. Selwyn Hartley (the Co.) walk up and down Gutter-lane (his warehouse was in that locality), any one would have thought him the best of citizens. His rosy, open face always lighted up by a smile of self-satisfaction—if it were assumed, he was a great actor—a free jaunty step showed he carried no weight in his bosom, but that his heart was as light as goodness could make it. His coat and hat, glossy as a raven, whilst his drab Bedford cords were as spotless as his own conscience should have been to have justified his appearance of self-content. His good-nature could not be questioned, as he never resented or remembered any coolness of

recognition, or jeering word from his trade-fellows, but passed on with a nod and smile for all. True, it was his habit to carry his hands in his trousers-pockets; a peculiarity some maliciously said, acquired from having his proffered civilities slighted or rejected; but he assigned a better reason. "He liked a man," he would say, "who could thrust his hands into his pockets and look the whole world in the face."

Mr. Selwyn Hartley could do that certainly, and without winking—most birds of prey can endure a strong light, and Mr. H. had devoured the substance of many men.

Mr. Selwyn Hartley was a man of money, however, and had plenty of acquaintance, as there are always people enough willing to accept the possession of wealth as an assurance of respectability and desirable companionship. His private house in Suburban Square was flashily, though incongruously furnished, and two or three times a year its treasures were exhibited to rather a mixed circle, assembled at what Mr. Hartley delighted to call a "conversationee," and occasionally at a

dinner party, ranging from six to a dozen of his business connexions, when the pastry-cook was called in to provide indigestibles, and put the, at other times, respectable household into confusion. Mr. Selwyn Hartley always gave champagne upon those occasions, and as the liquid served out was highly aërated and very fizzy, no one of the inexperienced guests ever suspected it was of home manufacture, procurable at a price so reasonable that to mention it might possibly excite incredulity. The port, the sherry, the claret, were marvels of practical chemistry, as they not only passed muster, but provoked frequent commendation—until the next morning. Mr. Selwyn Hartley's dinner-parties were distinguished by the intensity of the headaches they conferred on the *convives* who had partaken of them, "due," the host said, "to the quantity of wine consumed, to his great satisfaction, on every festive occasion."

Mr. Hartley had a reserved seat on the omnibus, and was more liberal than was agreeable in offering to his fellow-passengers a tasteless pre-

paration of tobacco-leaves made in Houndsditch, and which he persisted in calling cigars. He was not easily abashed or offended, but the names of his firm appearing very disadvantageously—if not disreputably—in a bankruptcy case, the banter and personalities became a shade or so too strong, and Mr. Hartley, to the relief of the other riders on the omnibus, resigned his seat, “taking,” as he expressed it—“his change out of the party,” by starting a red and yellow mail phaeton, drawn by a very clever cob, which he had bought a bargain of an insolvent butcher in want of a little ready money. From Suburban Square to Gutter Lane, and from Gutter Lane to Suburban Square was easy work enough for the clever little cob, which had been accustomed to do its day’s work by two o’clock, a.m., and then go out at five on a pleasure excursion with its master, the insolvent butcher, possibly spending the evening some six or eight miles from home, and returning when the dry skittle-ground had lost its charms, or the parlour company had been dispersed by the ‘chimes at

midnight.' Therefore, Mr. Hartley determined, that as idleness is the parent of vice—especially in horses, he would occasionally, say once a week, have a turn with the Surrey hounds. He could ride very well, as his father had required a pony to assist in his business of a country huckster or tallyman, and Jacob, as he was then called, lost no opportunity to acquire equestrian excellence, even at the expense of the pony's wind and knees. Jacob had received many a sound thrashing for his love of equitation, but the pain attendant upon detection added only to the pleasure of the transgression, and the remembrance of former enjoyment determined him to renew his acquaintance with the pig-skin, now that he was his own master, and could afford it. Nor was riding the only advantage he had derived from the early opportunities of instruction which he had enjoyed under his father's teaching. No. The tallyman is the bane of many a poor man's home, tempting the thoughtless wife to buy worthless finery on credit, that appears to be easy of payment, until the day of failure arrives.

Then comes the compulsory summons to the unsuspecting husband ; and strife, ill-will, and future mistrust enter the once happy home. Jacob had learned to regard such scenes as "only matters of business," reckoning his father's profits against the poor man's loss—and he indulged in the same comfortable delusion when he was selling himself wholesale to that Evil influence, whose name is never mentioned in good society.

Selwyn Hartley joined the Surrey Hunt, the meet being at Purley Downs, in the neighbourhood of Croydon. His 'get up' had been rather hurried, and presented a strange combination of articles—the evening and the morning being both represented. A black dress coat, a crimson velvet waistcoat displaying a lace frill, were met by white cord breeches and a pair of span new topboots of coachman-like construction, and the only person who was satisfied with the general effect was Selwyn Hartley himself. Although the field of the Surrey Hunt was eminently commercial, none knew him ; but he rode about among the assem-

bled horsemen smiling and staring everyone in the face as though they were old acquaintance, and the hounds and the country they hunted his individual possessions. So, having set the beggar on horseback, we will leave him for awhile, and time will show whether he will make the traditional journey, taking his own line of country for that purpose.

Of Selwyn Hartley's household we have said little, except that Mrs. Hartley was a gentle-minded woman, and that their children were many and sickly. Death had been busy amongst them during the twelve years which had passed since Uncle Jacob's death, and a boy and a girl were all that had been left to them. Selwyn bore these bereavements like a stoic philosopher that he was, and as the presence of his children had afforded him no enjoyment, their death caused him no sorrow. He came and went from what he called 'his home' with less thought or care for those who should have made it the dearest spot of earth, than he left or sought the dingy warehouse near Gutter Lane. The few hospitalities which

we have mentioned were practised to gratify his own love of vulgar display, or to increase his opportunities of gain from those he entertained. Mrs. Hartley's pleasure or convenience were never consulted, and though there were no positive acts of violence exercised towards her, yet her whole married life had been one of unsatisfied love and unrecognised obedience. Selwyn Hartley loved, nay, cared for no one but himself, not even for his noble, high-spirited boy Cecil, who owed, no doubt, the fine qualities he displayed to the absence of all association with his father, and the teaching of the excellent gentleman to whom his mother had confided his education.

The visitations of death in his house, we have said, made no change in Selwyn's selfish conduct towards his wife ; and when he has returned and found her weeping, like Rachel for her children, he has only sought to frighten away—not soothe her sorrow.

“I tell you what it is, my dear,” he would say, when some recent loss weighed heavily upon the poor mother's heart and forced the tears from her

eyes. "I tell you what it is, if I can't come home after a hard day's work without finding you snivelling and groaning over what can't be helped, I shall vote myself change of scene and air, I can tell you."

"Don't be cruel, Selwyn," she has answered. "Think—it was my child——"

"*My* child! Well, I like that uncommonly. *Our* child I should fancy, considering I am its father and at all the expense of doctor and undertaker. What would become of my business, I wonder, if I was to go fretting about the City and looking the picture of misery that you do. And this is your place of business, Rebecca—I expect you to do your part at home, whilst I do mine abroad."

"And I do, Selwyn; indeed I strive to do," she replied. "I have nursed night and day—I mean I do strive to be cheerful, and remember who has given and who has taken away."

"Very well—then be cheerful now, if you please. You never were considered over lively or talkative, but I'd rather have a little of your best than find

nobody at home but the blue devils. You ought to be happy—you've a capital house furnished like a palace; three pound a week for house-keeping, and nothing to pay towards coals, wine, or house rent. I've let you do as you like about Cecil—you've sent him to a public school almost, costing me one way or t'other nigh a hundred a-year."

"And see what a bright fellow he has become," said the mother, forgetting for a moment her dead loved ones in the promise of her darling boy. "He will make a name in the world, whatever may be his calling."

"He'll have a name in the 'London Directory,' under the head of 'Commercial,' I hope, and I don't care how soon he begins to qualify. I shan't stand more than another half, so you had better tell Dr. What's-his-name so when you see him."

"I am sure as you said yourself the other day, Cecil is wasting no time," replied the mother, "as he is making friends of some of the sons of the first merchants in the City."

"Do you think I should have let him been

there so long if I hadn't known that?" said Hartley, with a cunning chuckle. "No, old girl, you may think yourself very clever, but I am a shade or two cleverer where my interests are concerned. I shall astonish you some day by the use I mean to make of Cecil."

The anxious mother looked rather frightened at this announcement, but as Selwyn had taken a large bill-case from his pocket and began busying himself with the contents, Mrs. Hartley feared to press for further information as to her husband's future plans, but rose silently and went into an adjoining room, where her only remaining daughter was asleep. Pale and fragile as the angels who had preceded her, her slumber seemed to resemble that which knows no waking so nearly, that her mother's tears came fast as she bent over the little couch. She strove in vain to restrain them, fearing that she might be called to the cold hearted man who, now busied only about his gains or losses, was unconscious that a time would come when all which he would know of earthly peace or considerateness for himself would be associated

with the love and tenderness of that sleeping child.

Mrs. Hartley slept little during the succeeding night, as she knew enough of her husband's character not to anticipate much real advantage to her darling Cecil, from any plan which the father had devised for her son's future. Why did he laugh when he told her of his concealed intentions? Why did he not at once make her acquainted with them? What terrible shadows did her mother's love not conjure up throughout that almost sleepless night, and all because a father had promised to direct the future of a son.

Cecil Hartley was indeed deserving of all her love—all her motherly anxiety. He was a fine manly fellow for his age, nineteen nearly, and possessed all those qualities which endear young men to old and young. He was a great favourite with nearly all his schoolfellows, and had laid the seeds of one friendship at least which would grow with succeeding years.

Frank Lockyer was the chosen one. The son of a merchant of good standing in the city of

London, he had received the nurture of a gentleman from his cradle, and as an only child, had miraculously escaped being spoiled by indulgence. He and Cecil had during the last two years spent much of their vacation time together, although Mr. Lockyer, the father, had discouraged any intimacy with the elder Hartley, without having any further reason for doing so, than the fact, that no one with whom he was acquainted knew of such a person. Had Mr. Lockyer given himself the trouble to make closer inquiries he might possibly have thought less favourably of his son's friend and schoolfellow, but Cecil was so unobjectionable in himself, indeed so desirable a companion, that none but the most favourable opinions were entertained of his family connections.

Selwyn Hartley became strangely liberal to his son Cecil, allowing him a sufficient supply of money, and an unlimited account with his tailor. Nor did he seek to force his acquaintance upon either of the Lockyers, being content, it seemed, to have Cecil received into such an excellent connection. Possibly he was worldly-wise enough to

think that Philcher & Co. might not be considered sufficiently well esteemed in the commercial world to take their place with the merchant princes, or even with those of the lower grade assigned to Lockyer, Bland, & Company.

It was not until Cecil had left school that his father began to make use of him, and there was something original in his mode of doing so. Mr. Hartley had continued to hunt occasionally with the Surrey, and had picked up a few acquaintance thereby. He had become some way remarkable for his dandyfied appearance, being always dressed *point de vice*, as though he was anxious to remove by his after completeness of attire any unfavourable impression he might have created by his first appearance. He bought a second horse, and then presented the cob to Cecil with a request that he would invite his young friend Lockyer to accompany them to the next meet of the Surrey. Both young men were delighted at the proposal, and one round of the ladder, which Mr. Hartley intended to mount by his son's help, was gained. Frank Lockyer knew many of the

men out, and as a matter of course introduced his friend Cecil, whose own personal recommendations soon procured him a welcome from many members of the Hunt. Mr. Selwyn Hartley kept himself apart, evidently undesirous of intruding upon a society which had treated him with reserve and coolness; but after two or three meetings of a similar kind, introductions became almost a matter of course, and Mr. Hartley was hail fellow with many of the first men in the City.

Mr. Selwyn Hartley had hardly any defined notion of the use which he proposed to make of the advantage to be derived from an improved connection. Philcher had taken him into his warehouse as a combination of clerk and errand-boy. He had admitted him in due time to the mysteries and rascalities of dealing in job lots. He had shown him particular kindness and favour by taking him into partnership, and now that Philcher had grown old in commercial sins, and since Uncle Jacob's legacies, he had delegated to Mr. Hartley the more active management of the

business. All these past considerations on the part of the aged Philcher were no reasons why Mr. Selwyn Hartley should not throw the old fellow overboard, and with him the reputation of the more doubtful transactions in which they had hitherto engaged, and with a new name and new connections make a place for himself in the City annals, and possibly become Lord Mayor of London !

Let us wipe our pen, and for a while leave such shabby records.

Cecil had accepted an invitation to spend a week with Frank Lockyer at Holly Lodge, near Hilltown, and they had determined to proceed thither in a light dog-cart belonging to Frank's father, a horse being sent on from the Lodge the day before to meet them mid-way on their journey. No lighter hearts travelled the road towards Hilltown that day, and their wheels as they spun over the hard turnpike road, made cadence to the pleasant voices of the young men. A clear, brisk January day is just the time for

such a journey, more particularly when there has been only a light frost any day for a week past, and the hounds within an hour's ride of your destination on the morrow.

Step along, good horse ! there are five miles of straight road before you, then a gentle hill, at whose summit stands a roadside inn renowned the country round for good entertainment for man and horse. Walk now, old fellow—walk so that you may slake your drought shortly as your masters will do, and when your sleek hide has had a refreshing rub, you shall take your feed. Whilst you are so pleasantly engaged, a luncheon of sweet bread and cheese as rich as butter, both worthy of the nappy ale which accompanies them, will have placed you and your masters on an equality of content.

Another seven miles, and the change was made—the groom who had brought on the second horse remaining behind to return home with the first later in the evening.

Conversation between the two young men was soon resumed.

"I hope you will like your horse to-morrow, Cecil, as we shall hunt the best part of our country if the wind keeps where it is," said Frank.

"I am not very particular about my mount," replied Cecil, "so that he can gallop a little and jump pretty well. I am not a first flight man, as you know. We meet near your house, you said?"

"Yes. A quiet hour's ride, at Old Court, and Wycherly, who lives there, always gives a breakfast, so we are sure of some jumping powder if we feel nervous. We shall have some ladies out, I have no doubt, as Miss Wycherly hunts, though I have never seen her. She rides very well, they say."

"I don't care to see ladies in the hunting-field," said Cecil. "They are very ornamental at a meet, but I am always so awfully afraid of their coming to grief."

"That rarely happens," replied his friend, "as they are generally well mounted and well piloted. I don't know that I should hesitate to

marry a girl that hunted"—adding after a pause—"but I shall never marry, I fancy."

"You not marry," cried Cecil, laughing aloud. "No fellow more likely—why you are quite a ladies' man, Frank."

"I don't deny the soft impeachment," replied the other. "I like the society of women, provided they are not positively ugly, ill-tempered, or too vain of their pretty faces and graceful figures."

"Then why do you say you shall never marry? You are always making yourself agreeable to some girl or the other?" asked Cecil.

"True, I am partial to a little pleasant fooling, I confess; but my experience has shown me that all girls are alike in the aggregate, and I have never felt a preference for any." Frank Lockyer, the speaker, had arrived at the mature age of two-and-twenty.

"Your time will come some day, old boy," said Cecil. "You are too good a fellow to be a male flirt, or a *roué*."

"God forbid that I should be either," replied

Frank, very seriously. "I think a man who trifles with a girl's affections the worst of scoundrels, and a *roué* is fool as well as villain, for he excludes himself by his vices from the chiefest blessing of life, the society of good women : no, Cecil, I shall be neither a flirt nor a *roué*."

"I know you won't,—you are much too good a fellow to be either," said Cecil, patting his friend's shoulder. "I shall live to be your best man some day, rely upon it."

"If ever I want support on such a trying but unlikely event, I shall remind you of what you have said, my friend," replied Frank, with a laugh. "It will only be a return for waiting upon you on a like occasion."

"I don't know that," said Cecil. "I have never given such a matter a thought,—my circle of female acquaintance not presenting many temptations to go wife-hunting."

The time may come when all this idle talk will be remembered.

"Yonder is Old Court down in the bottom there," said Frank.

The setting winter sun had lighted up the large latticed windows of Old Court, as at the time when Jacob Selwyn received comfort from the sight. The road to the lodge then took a turn, and when the young men looked again at the old moated house the light was gone, and the gables, and above them the surrounding trees, showed darkly against the background of fiery clouds.

Holly Lodge was reached at last, and the young travellers were welcomed heartily.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HUNT BREAKFAST AT OLD COURT.—SOMETHING ABOUT THE RUN, WHICH ENDED WITH DINNER AT THE ROSEBUSH.

THERE were evidences of frost on the windows, in the fields, on the trees, and housetops the next morning, as though winter, like a vain widow, would not dispense with her diamonds even in her desolateness. Our young sportsmen might therefore have despaired of their anticipated enjoyment had not the sun come forth bright and warm, promising to dispel the impediment to their day's sport. Neither Cecil nor Frank laid any restraint on their good appetites when a substantial breakfast was placed before them, intending to accept or refuse Mr. Wycherly's hospitality according to circumstances. Old Mr. Lockyer had some premonitions of gout and de-

clined being of their party, as he had originally intended, for although a Londoner, he had been a keen sportsman throughout his life. When the horses were brought to the door, and Cecil and Frank mounted, looking two as likely fellows to make their way across country as you would find in broad England, Mr. Lockyer threw up his bedroom window to wish them good morrow, and give them his parting valediction ; adding—

“ Now mind, Master Frank, you take care of the horses. If you’ve a long run put up and give them some gruel ; and mind, I don’t wait one minute after six for dinner. Mr. Cecil will excuse my saying so,—after that time you must shift for yourselves. You’ll not try to find before twelve, and I don’t think the scent will be good, and hi ! don’t blaze all over the country that I’ve done something to my great toe ! ”

The youngsters laughed, and waved their hands in token of amicable relations with the high contracting party, and rode on their way to Old Court. The main road might have been a trifle nearer, but there was a bridle way through the

fields leading to Pemberton Wood, which was much more tempting. The keen fresh air of the morning was delicious, and the fine animals which the young men rode, evidently conscious of the coming enjoyment, showed their satisfaction by tossing their heads and curvetting on the sparkling turf, but settling after a while into a quiet walk.

Taking one of the rides—the frost had yielded to the sun-rays every here and there showing patches of green—the young men indulged in a gentle trot, and the withered twigs blown from the trees crackling beneath the horses' hoofs, disturbed sundry pheasants which had ventured from the underwood, and whose loud "cock-cock," as they sought the shelter of the trees, made the invading steeds prick up their ears, and gaze about with large distended eyes.

"What a glorious morning," cried Cecil, unbuttoning his coat and expanding his broad chest, when they had pulled up on coming to a lane, "I feel as though I could ride for my life on this fine fellow, who seems as happy as I am! I shall

remember my ride through that wood—what do you call it?”

“Pemberton Wood,” replied Frank.

“I shall remember my ride through it as long as I live.” He did do so, and recalled all the pleasurable emotions he had experienced long after, when the world had dealt very hardly by him.

At the end of the lane they were traversing was the covert to be drawn later in the day, and they took counsel together whether they should wait then for the coming of the hounds or ride on to Old Court, now distant about a mile-and-a-quarter.

“The meet is advertised for eleven,” said Frank, “but twelve will be nearer the time after this frost. I vote for Old Court, as I should like to have a close look at Miss Kate Wycherly and the other Dianas.”

“Old Court be it then,” replied Cecil. “Yonder’s the house I suppose, and some one seems to have been over this gap. Shall we follow our leader?”

“All right,” said Frank, and the horses hopping through the gap were soon cantering away over

the green sward of what had once been Old Court Park, and which still retained something of its past aristocratic appearance, although intersected here and there by low hedges, whilst its surface had been scored by the plough in various directions, leaving, occasionally, a stately tree still standing in the centre of some of the fields.

The space of ground enclosed by the moat was not large enough to accommodate the horses of all comers, and the labourers and lads engaged to take care of the hunters whilst breakfast was on, had assembled in the home paddock, some of them provided with horse cloths and sacks in case such accommodation should be required for their animals by any of the more careful visitors. Several arrivals had already taken place, and Mr. Wycherly was standing on the door steps giving a hearty welcome to all comers.

Two horses with side saddles were on the lawn, and as they were partially clothed and their legs road-stained, it was evident that Miss Kate was not to be the only lady out.

"I hope the riders are pretty," said Frank in an under tone to Cecil.

"Well—yes, they may as well have that advantage," replied Cecil, not caring much about the matter.

Frank was known slightly to Wycherly, and was received with a hearty shake of the hand.

"Very glad to see you and your friend too," said the hospitable host. "You'll find other friends in the room to the right." And so the young men entered the cave of Destiny.

At the upper end of the table the light from the large window falling aslant upon her bright face and glossy hair sat Kate Wycherly, chatting and laughing merrily with two lady equestrians, both of whom were plump and middle aged, as though they had been selected as foils to her own youth and—no, not beauty, not prettiness—the right word is wanting.

She moved her head graciously to the new comers, who returned her salutation and took their places at the end of the table furthest from Kate. You, reader, already surmise that the fate of those

young people will become henceforth intermingled, but they had no such foreboding.

No—Frank and Cecil had recovered a portion of the appetite they had lost at the Lodge and “did justice,” as it is called, to a cold pheasant, and a jug of admirable October, nor were they singular as the good things provided, grills and devils and broils upon the centre table disappeared with wonderful rapidity, nor was the rosy sirloin of beef on the sideboard unregarded by those who coming in with hands chilled by their ride, had sought the great wood fire blazing in the large old chimney, and been unable to resist the fascination of the national joint which stood beside it.

“Hark, papa!” said Kate, rising, “there’s the huntsman’s horn!”

“Hush, my dear,” replied Wycherly, smiling, “you and I should be the last to hear it, or our friends may think you want to save your breakfast.”

All the guests, however, applauded Miss Wycherly’s proper consideration for the real business of the day, some with their mouths full,

some murmuring in breakfast cups, or tankards, or glasses as they hastened to finish their refection and take the field.

The hounds and huntsmen were moving quietly about the paddock where the Master was declaring his devotion to Miss Wycherly in a glass of Old Court-made cherry brandy, whilst the rest of the field were making needful preparations by tightening girths or mounting their horses.

“Tan-tan” from the huntsman and the whole party were in motion, soon reaching the covert before mentioned. The hounds were thrown in, but the draw proving blank gave the two plump horsewomen a longer ride with the gentlemen than they had calculated upon, and when the next covert yielded a fox their fair round faces had become exceedingly rosy and their crisp ringlets very much disordered.

“Away! away!” but as we cannot keep pace with Digby Grand, of Market Harborough, or with him who led the way (but, alas! will lead it no more!) for Mr. Jorrocks, Soapey Sponge, Facey Romford, and a large field besides, the run which

ensued must be recorded in most unsportsmanlike fashion.

Frank and Cecil soon separated when the hounds got to work and the former found himself not far away from his fair hostess, who had obtained the lead of her father. Frank had taken a low hedge and was looking towards Kate to see how she got over when he noticed her horse stumble after clearing the jump and pull up dead lame. He rode towards her immediately with the intention of offering assistance.

"Pray do not mind me, sir," she said smiling as pleasantly as though the accident had produced no disappointment whatever. "Pray keep on, sir, my horse has stubbed himself, I fancy. Thanks, but pray keep on. My father is here."

Frank bowed and obeyed her, but for some reason or the other he was not satisfied with himself for doing so.

The scent was bad and the hounds soon came to a check. While they were questing about Mr. Wycherly rode up to Frank and thanked him for his kindness in looking to Kate's mishap.

"Stubbed her horse," said Wycherly; "the little puss would not keep with me or I could have told her that the hedgers had been at work where she was going. However," he continued, laughing, "she has lost the run. Our keeper's cottage was at the corner of the field, so I let her go there by herself."

The hounds had picked up the scent again and were off to music. Again it was lost! Again found and run until a kill. A second fox brought the day's sport to an end, and as Frank and Cecil had kept with the hounds—Mr. Wycherly had gone home after the first kill—they found themselves about eight miles from Holly Lodge, and on the further side of Hilltown which they had ringed round almost in the course of the day.

"No dinner at home to-day," said Frank, looking at his watch, "so the sooner we find other quarters the better. There's a capital little public about a quarter of a mile on, where we can make sure of something well-cooked and cleanly served. I think we had better jog on in case any one fore-stalls us."

So swinging away gently to suit their tired horses the two friends made way to "The Rosebush," whose picturesque outside and clean white curtains within, were enough to invite the favourable opinion of the wayfarer.

Nor did the Rosebush by Hester Masham belie its outward promise. When Peter Masham died, leaving little to his widow after payment of his creditors, Mr. Wycherly, remembering the helplessness of the playmate of his daughter Kate and indignant at the conduct of the fortunate legatee Hartley, assisted Mrs. Masham to gather together the wreck of her husband's property, and having, as he said, a few idle pounds himself, bought the Rosebush Inn, and induced Hester to become its tenant. Her previous experience fitted her for such employment, but there were difficulties in the way of her acceptance of it, arising entirely from her consideration for her daughter Ruth. Mrs. Masham knew, she said, how slightly many people regarded a young girl who was placed as she herself had been, and how frequently that position had been rendered painful, even to

her, who had a bold spirit and not much refinement of character, by the inconsiderateness, to use the mildest term, of those with whom she was compelled to come in contact. Ruth was too gentle, too sensitive, for such exposure, and any other means of providing for their mutual requirements would be more acceptable to both of them.

Mr. Wycherly at once admitted the force of this objection, but suggested an alternative. Ruth should keep a school, and thus be spared the necessity for assisting her mother, whilst she would have the satisfaction of bearing her own burthen, in part, at least. So Mrs. Masham became mistress of the Rosebush, and a small school-room was built in the garden for Ruth; and by Mr. Wycherly's aid and countenance, a fair number of scholars were also secured.

The Rosebush ignored anything so vulgar as "a tap," but the parlour was the rendezvous of the neighbouring farmers and others who had known Peter. There was a capital trout stream close at hand, and the fishing was obtained for

visitors to the Rosebush, which soon became very popular with the professors of the gentle craft ; for however disappointing the day's sport might have been, there was always a certainty of comfort and good cheer to make amends for it. There was also a well kept bowling-green, surrounded by cosy arbours, and in summer-time the holiday-makers from Hilltown were numerous and constant. Mrs. Masham contrived, therefore, to make both ends meet, if she did not lay by any large amount of profits for her darling daughter Ruth. The comely matron, it was said, might have relieved herself from her responsibilities had she been so minded, but Hester appeared to have had a sufficient experience of matrimony, and was content to devote herself to the interests of her child.

Frank Lockyer had made more than one previous visit to the Rosebush. He had heard Ruth playing on the piano—part of the salvage of the family wreck—and highly commending the performance had won sufficiently upon Hester to obtain an introduction into the little

sanctum behind the bar. He was struck by the taste and neatness with which the room was arranged, and surprised to find in Ruth the evidence of her gentle nurture, and the absence of *gaucherie* and ill-bred embarrassment, although she was perfectly quiet and unassuming. Frank was himself a very fair musician, and having had opportunities of hearing the best public exponents he had made his short casual visits exceedingly interesting to Ruth by several additions to her stock of musical knowledge. Mrs. Masham, therefore, received him and Cecil with even more than her usual courtesy, and whilst the young men were occupied in seeing their tired horses properly cared for, she prepared an excellent dinner, to which her guests brought hunters' appetites. When their meal was ended, Cecil said, "Your confidence in the Rosebush was not misplaced. I never made a better dinner in my life."

"I'm glad of that. Mrs. Masham is no ordinary person, I assure you. She is the widow of a brewer, and formerly lived at Hilltown in a good position. She has a very pretty, amiable

daughter that she keeps out of the business, and to whom I have had the pleasure of an introduction."

"Of course, Frank," said Cecil, demurely. "You are a ladies' man, you know."

Frank then told Cecil how he had become known to Ruth, and what a pleasant intimacy had grown up between them, although many weeks had intervened between each of his visits.

"I have no doubt that Miss Masham would give us an audience this evening if the queen mother is graciously disposed. I'll see," said Frank. He left the room, and soon returned again, to say that his embassy had been successful, and that they were to be presented accordingly.

Cecil thought he had never seen a gentler face than Ruth's, or listened to a sweeter voice than hers, as she sang a simple ballad which Frank had given her on a former visit; and he did not wonder at the mother's pride beaming from Hester's eyes as she listened to her daughter's song, and observed the admiration the singer ex-

cited. Cecil little thought how nearly allied his father had been to the buxom hostess, and how widely separated now by his father's act and deed. Mr. Selwyn Hartley had found it convenient to forget Hilltown, and all those connected with it, and had forbidden Mrs. Hartley to make the most distant allusion to them.

"I desire," he said, one day, "I desire that you never mention that detestable place, and my most ungrateful relatives. I wish to forget them. To sweep them from the surface of my remembrance clean!" and he passed the palms of his hands over each other, suiting the action to the word.

No wonder he desired to forget Hilltown and all its associations, but in what the ingratitude of his poor ruined cousins consisted it would have puzzled a conjuror to discover. Mrs. Hartley never disputed or disobeyed any command of her husband, and Cecil, therefore had grown up in perfect ignorance of his father's kindred and former connection with Hilltown, or he might perhaps, had he known Ruth's claims upon his consideration, referred to the conversation which

he and Frank had held together on their way down to the Lodge. Frank was certainly making himself very agreeable to pretty, gentle Ruth, and doubtless without any evil intention. Is there not an old Italian story of a careless lover presenting his dear mistress with a rose? The flower had been poisoned by mistake; and—there is some such legend.

The cuckoo-clock sang eight as the two friends mounted for their homeward ride, both taking a respectful leave of their entertainer, as though no pecuniary ceremony had passed between them. The moon was at the full, and the rime on tree and grass glittered like fairy gems. The cottage windows, ruddy from the fires within, contrasted cheerfully with the moonlight and the myriads of stars visible in the heavens. The young men trotted on, so long as their way was on the turnpike-road, and the clear, sharp ring of their horses' feet announced that Jack Frost had been road-making since the sun had gone down, and promised to continue his work until stream and lake would bear also.

The two friends had intended to have kept the high road all the way home, but the appearance of the ride through Pemberton Wood was too attractive to be avoided. Here and there the dark shadows of the trees meeting overhead changed the frosted turf into the softest grey, harmonising, as does all nature-work, with the silver patches thrown down by the moon through every break in the vista.

The horses' feet fell noiselessly upon the turf, and the riders were silent from admiration, neither dreaming that the prologue to the drama of their lives had been spoken, although they had heard it not.

After a while the horses pricked forward their ears, their quick sense of hearing having been disturbed by some sound unheeded by their masters. The flash of a gun, the noise of a falling substance dropping from bough to bough, explained the cause of their disturbance. Both horses started, and would have turned round had not the skill of their riders controlled them. Before they had done so, Cecil saw by the flash

of the discharged gun the face of the man who had fired it, so strongly illuminated that every feature was more distinctly shown than it would have been in the broad daylight. So strong was the impression made upon Cecil that when his horse was quieted he looked in the direction whence the shot had been fired, expecting almost to see the face still lighted up with such remarkable distinctness. It was gone, however, the cracking of branches far in the wood told in what direction.

“One of those rascally poachers,” said Frank. “This neighbourhood is infested by them. I should have liked to have surprised the fellow, and laid my crop about his shoulders.”

“I could swear to the fellow’s face among a thousand,” said Cecil. “I can see it now as distinctly as I see the moon.”

“See it? How could you see it?” asked Frank in surprise.

“The fire from the gun—I fancy it must have been a flint-lock—showed me every feature of the man’s face. It seemed like a fiery mask among

the dark bushes. The effect was most extraordinary and striking," replied Cecil.

"I trust your recollection will hold good should we come across the vagabond. I detest a poacher almost as much as I despise those who encourage him," said Frank.

Cecil's recollection of that face did hold good, although years, and many joys and sorrows had mingled their memories with it.

Mr. Lockyer had become rather impatient for the return of the young sportsmen, not that he had any anxiety concerning them or their horses; but the gout—that is, the pain in his toe—was becoming less intermittent, and he wanted to go to bed; but, as the old soldier

— "shouldered his crutch
And showed how fields were won,"

so nothing is more pleasant to an old foxhunter than to talk over a good run, even if he has not had the felicity of being present. Therefore Mr. Lockyer became impatient for the return of his son and his guest, and was rewarded at last by the

full, true, and particular account of the proceedings of the day, from the breakfast at Old Court to the dinner at the Rosebush, although it must be recorded that no mention was made either by Frank or Cecil of the charming little singer and the charming little concert which had closed the evening entertainment at Mrs. Masham's.

The poacher would have been a grand incident in their narrative, but as Frank knew that the mention of it would irritate his good father, and perhaps tend to develope the pain in his toe, he had arranged with Cecil to say nothing about it until Mr. Lockyer was again on horseback, in his town-made boots, which were cut to such accuracy of fit that they would not have admitted the obtrusion of a seedling bunion. Mr. Lockyer had been so much interested by the conversation of the young men, that in acknowledgment, he kindly related the particulars of certain long-winded runs in which he had borne a conspicuous part—as Frank had heard a hundred times before. From a sense of filial duty, however, the younger sportsman endeavoured to follow the elder through-

out a tremendous day with the H. H., and Cecil, grateful for the hospitalities of Holly Lodge, tried to keep in their company; but tired nature would have way, and the two young men fell asleep at the moment when Mr. Lockyer's mare, taking a brook in her stride, landed him first at the finish, and—

“The rest was silence.”

When Frank and Cecil awoke they found the fire had gone out, and conjectured that Mr. Lockyer had retired to bed in dudgeon, as the liqueur-case and cigar-box had been removed and locked up in the sideboard.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FROST, AND WHAT CAME OF IT AT OLD COURT AND THE ROSEBUSH INN.

JACK FROST had continued to be busy throughout the night, covering the window-panes with fantastic crystal-work, hardening the roads with his cold breath, and bridging over the streams and ponds with ice. He never rested for the succeeding four days and nights, and all hope of another day with the hounds was over for the time present. Frank and Cecil amused themselves as well as they could—shooting a little, skating a little, and smoking a great deal more than was good for them.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, Mr. Wycherly's groom arrived at the Lodge with a letter from his master. It was dated from Old Court and ran thus —

“DEAR SIR,

“As the frost seems likely to hold for some time, and as hunting is at an end till it breaks, we propose to-morrow to have a frolic on our lake, and if you and your young friend will join our party, we shall be delighted to see you. Luncheon at two o’clock, and other refreshments from daylight till dark.

“Yours faithfully,

“HERBERT WYCHERLY.”

A more acceptable proposal could not have been made to two weather-bound young fellows with more animal spirits than they could manage to expend upon each other, and the invitation was answered accordingly, and by good time in the morning they were on their road to Old Court.

As they drew near to the house, it was evident that there was to be a large gathering of frozen-in neighbours, and the stables, barns, and sheds down at the homestead were nearly filled with the horses of the assembled visitors. A rude

shanty had been constructed with hurdles and rick-cloths on the margin of the lake, wherein some of the servants of the house dispensed tea and coffee, or even more stimulating beverages. There were several skaters displaying their accomplishments to the ladies on the ice and on the banks, whilst others were sliding or giving support to some fair damsel more venturesome than her companions. Mr. Wycherly was master of the ceremonies, and adding to the general merriment by his awkward attempts to skate, keeping his daughter Kate in a continual state of interesting alarm for his safety. Cecil and Frank were excellent skaters, and, after paying their respects to Miss Wycherly and her father, became the most conspicuous among the performers on the ice. Some very clever feat of Cecil's obtained the unrestrained applause of the ladies, which he acknowledged by a graceful bow, as in duty bound. Having stopped opposite to Kate Wycherly, he inquired if she would venture to take an initiatory lesson, but his offer was declined with a merry laugh.

"I should never have courage to make the attempt, especially before such an assemblage as the present. Papa is making himself sufficiently ridiculous for both of us," she said.

"I assure you it is very easy of performance, or I should not have been so fortunate as to have met with approval," replied Cecil. "I am a very clumsy fellow, I assure you."

"Ah! now you are asking for a compliment," said Kate. "We are all country bred at Old Court, and do not practise that accomplishment. I hope you are not tired?"

"Not in the least," answered Cecil, not taking the hint to continue his skating. "I wish I could persuade you to make an attempt. But stay—what is that yonder? A sledge, I declare! I shall be most happy to put it to use." And so saying, he skated away towards an improvised sleigh—a large arm-chair, to which had been attached two rude rockers, the work of the village wheelwright.

Cecil soon returned to the assembled group, pushing before him his new acquisition, and was

surprised to see Miss Wycherly tenderly embracing Ruth Masham.

Cecil recognised the lady of the "Rosebush" with a bow, and received a bashful smile and curtsy in return. Kate's quick eye noticed instantly what was passing, and Cecil saw that Ruth was explaining how they had gained knowledge of each other.

"Now, ladies," said Cecil, "I am waiting for a volunteer. I will promise to conduct you in perfect safety, and with the speed of a reindeer."

"A volunteer! A volunteer!" shouted all the pretty lips at once, but none ventured to accept the invitation.

"I will devote myself," said Kate, after a while, "if you will all promise to follow your leader."

"Yes, all! all!" sang the chorus; and Cecil was likely to have sufficient employment if "all" kept their engagements.

Kate was duly installed in the chair, and wrapped about with cloaks and shawls; affecting the utmost courage even if she felt any mistrust for her safety. She needed not to have been the

least alarmed, as Cecil was a skilful skater, and they went whirling over the ice to the admiration of the ladies and the envy of the gentlemen, who thought the stranger from London was cutting them out in all ways.

When the further end of the lake had been reached, and Cecil paused to recover his breath a little, Kate looked up at him over her shoulder, and said in her sweetest tones :

“ Oh how very delightful ! I often imagined the pleasure birds must have in skimming through the air, and I am sure I have experienced some of the sensations of flying. I am afraid you must be tired.”

“ Not in the least—only a little out of breath, I assure you,” replied Cecil.

“ You know my dear friend Ruth Masham, do you not ?” asked Kate, rather abruptly.

“ Very slightly. I was introduced to her by my friend Lockyer at her mother’s house on the evening of that capital run—when you had the misfortune to lame your horse.”

“ Oh, were you out on that day ?” said Kate, her

face, rosy as it had been before, growing rosier from a blush. "Your friend Mr. Lockyer has been very kind to Ruth, has he not?"

"I fancy he has lent her some music—nothing more," replied Cecil.

"Several times, I think. Ruth is a dear, gentle girl, and very grateful—too grateful sometimes for the smallest kindness," adding, after a very brief pause, "which I have shown her. Are you sufficiently recovered to resume your self-imposed task?"

Cecil was quite recovered, and back he sped with the sleigh, to the delight of the ladies.

Cecil found his sleigh getting rather too popular, and he resigned it for a time to Frank, who considerately came to his rescue. Mr. Wycherly was greatly delighted that his notion had proved such a success; and when Ruth Masham positively declined to take her turn under Frank's pilotage, he volunteered to be her propeller, and came to grief accordingly when she had assented to his proposal.

The exhibition of a white flag at the Hall door

announced that luncheon was ready; and to reward the gallant exertions of Cecil, Kate was confided to him, whilst Frank had charge of pretty Ruth, Mr. Wycherly foregoing his own claims to her arm, as he was always her cavalier whenever she visited Old Court. And so the merry party returned to the house, and enjoyed the hospitality prepared for them. Most of the ladies then took their departure, and the few gentlemen who remained sauntered about, chatting and smoking their cigars, more than one asking Wycherly the name of his new friend.

"He came with young Lockyer," replied Wycherly, "and I fancy his name is Mr. Cecil."

"That may be his Christian name," observed one.

"Yes — it may. I'll ask Lockyer," replied Wycherly, going to Frank.

"Well, sir, we've had a pleasant day, and I am much indebted to you and your friend Mr. Cecil— Am I right in calling him so?"

"Partly," replied Frank, smiling. "His name is Cecil Hartley."

"Hartley!" said Wycherly, abruptly. "He is not any connection, I hope, of Jacob Hartley——"

"I should say not," answered Frank. "His father's name is Selwyn Hartley—a merchant in London," replied Frank.

"A great scoundrel, wherever he lives," said Wycherly, sharply.

"Mr. Wycherly, that is a very offensive term to apply to my friend's father," replied Frank, warmly.

"It is, and I ought not to have used it in your hearing, Mr. Lockyer," said Wycherly; "but I have known so much bad of that man—seen so much misery caused by him to others—that my indignation got the better of my courtesy. Do you know this—father?"

"Very slightly, sir," replied Frank, coldly. "Cecil I do know most intimately, and a more noble, generous, warm-hearted fellow does not live. I am sorry to have heard what you have said of his father."

"And I am sorry to have said it, as it has given you pain. I think it right to

myself to give you some reason for my indignation."

"I would rather hear nothing which Cecil should not hear also," replied Frank.

"Nor shall you. You may repeat all that I say at Hilltown market-place. I will merely state certain facts which are known to every one who has lived in this neighbourhood a few years, and you can then judge for yourself."

Wycherly then, as briefly as he could, told the story of Jacob Selwyn's will, which had done so much injustice to Peter Masham and Jeffery Garrett; and Frank was compelled to acknowledge to himself that Mr. Selwyn Hartley's conduct was remarkably fishy. He said, however,

"I can say nothing in justification of Mr. Hartley's harsh treatment of his cousins. I am sorry to hear that he was capable of such—of such——"

"Cold-blooded, grasping conduct," said Wycherly, filling up the sentence.

"Of such conduct," repeated Frank; "and none would coincide in my opinion more than my

friend Cecil. No two persons can be more opposite in character than Cecil and his father. I am sorry to have been the means of introducing him to you, Mr. Wycherly, who——”

“No, no!” interrupted Wycherly. “I beg you will not think that I am prejudiced against the son on account of his bad father. I like your friend exceedingly, and shall always be glad to meet him here or elsewhere.”

Mr. Wycherly did not know himself when he said this. He did not know how obstinate he was in his dislikes ; how unreasonable he was in his prejudices ; or how he should always associate the evil he remembered of the father with his estimate of the unoffending son. Wycherly's was an honest nature, and could ill conceal what was uppermost in his thoughts, and for the rest of their short stay at Old Court, he appeared to avoid Cecil, and certainly parted from him with a coolness which could not be unnoticed by either of the friends. They had not proceeded far on their homeward journey—both having been silent for some time—when Cecil asked a question which

Frank had anticipated he would ask from the time they had left Old Court.

“What was the matter with Mr. Wycherly? I mean what was the reason for his sudden change of manners towards us—at least towards me? He was almost rude when we parted.”

Frank did not know how to reply. He was too ingenuous to practise dissimulation, and he loved his friend too much to give him pain. His silence was more than confirmatory that something had passed which affected Cecil.

“Frank, my friend, something has been said which you do not care to repeat to me. I cannot understand why you should hesitate to do so. Mr. Wycherly and you were talking some time together after lunch. Was I the subject of your conversation?”

What could Frank say but “Yes. I mean you were incidentally alluded to.”

“And to my prejudice? If so, I know that I was not permitted to be wronged in any way, as you were the listener. What was said?”

“My dear Cecil, I feel that I ought not longer

to keep silent, as you would imagine that something worse had passed between us than really has been the case. I should not have hesitated a moment had you alone been the subject of any misrepresentation,—if any misconception had been formed respecting yourself, because I believe you incapable of wrong ; but as another was concerned, and that other your father, I could have wished to have been spared repeating what I have heard.”

Cecil repeated the words “My father! my father!” in a low thoughtful tone, and then after a pause painful to both, added, “Ought I to ask you to say more? Is it anything which will create an unfilial feeling towards my father?”

Frank was again silent.

“I must know,” cried Cecil. “I feel that I shall imagine some act—some conduct which, I trust, must be more censurable than the reality. Do not hesitate. I will confess to you”—his voice was now hoarse and low—“that I shall not be shocked—perhaps not surprised—to learn that

he has practised some clever trickery to gain a desired end, for I have heard him call certain actions cleverness when I could have found a harder name for them. You can now speak freely, Frank."

Frank yielded at once, and recapitulated all that he had learned from Wycherly.

"It is a sad, miserable story," Cecil said, when his friend had finished, "and partakes largely of the cleverness of which I spoke just now. Let me ask this. Did Wycherly infer that anything wrong had been done about the will? I mean any other wrong than the use Mr. Hartley had made of his influence with his uncle to obtain the portions intended at one time for his cousins?"

"No, not exactly; certainly not in direct terms," replied Frank.

Cecil burst into tears; but whether they were caused by his joy that such an accusation had not been made, or sorrow that such an imputation was not quite withheld, who can say?

Frank left Cecil undisturbed to the relief his

tears afforded him, and neither spoke again until they entered the ride in Pemberton Wood.

“And so,” said Cecil, “although I cannot positively claim kindred with our friends at the ‘Rosebush,’ I might, had circumstances turned out differently, have called Mrs. Masham aunt, and pretty, gentle Ruth my dear cousin.”

“Yes ; so it seems,” replied Frank.

“Frank, old fellow, you must let me ride or drive over to them to-morrow, alone, if you please. I must tell them who I am, and learn something more of this shabby story than you or Mr. Wycherly care to tell me. My poor mother”—he had to pause awhile—“My poor mother must have known somewhat of this matter, and have had her gentle spirit wounded deeply by it. Since I could observe and reflect upon what I saw, I have felt what a martyrdom her life has been. I wanted only this knowledge to determine me as to my future course. We will talk no more of this at present, as I wish to carry a cheerful face, if not a light heart, into your father’s house.”

The two friends grasped each other’s hands,

and vowed silently to be as Saul and Jonathan had been in the old time, and that no strife should ever come between them.

Frank was surprised in the morning to find Cecil more talkative than he had ever known him, although the hectic flush upon his cheek and his feverish lip told how restlessly the night had been passed.

When the horses were brought to the door, Mr. Lockyer, made envious by his gout, complimented the young men on their hardihood and disregard of the biting cold, promising to use his influence to procure them appointments in the next Arctic expedition, should another ever be projected. Little did he think how one brain throbbed and burned,—how one heart was beating its wholesome blood into a feverish stream which neither snow, nor ice, nor frost could cool into the calm and equal flow of the preceding morning.

Frank felt too much for Cecil's distress to care for anything but its alleviation, and he had insisted upon accompanying him on his way

to the "Rosebush," and then to wait his return at Hilltown. To that friendly arrangement Cecil at first demurred, as he felt that his own excited thoughts would occupy him too much to admit of any other companionship; but Frank would not be denied, and urged that Cecil's absence without him would cause surprise if it did not provoke inquiry at home.

The two friends parted in silence when they had reached the point of the road at which their separation was to take place, but each read in the other's face the anxious thoughts which oppressed them.

Cecil rode straight to the stables of the inn, and having seen that his horse would be cared for, slowly made his way to the front door, which he had entered and left so lately with a light and happy heart.

Mrs. Masham received him in her usual urbane manner; but Cecil strove in vain to meet her without a strong feeling of restraint, believing that she knew so much to his father's discredit, that when he should reveal to her his name,

some undefined dishonour would cling to him also. Mrs. Masham was rather embarrassed by this change in Cecil, and placed it to the account of the young man's rejection of any approach to familiarity in a person of her condition, and she was about to summon the parlour-maid to attend him, when he laid his hands upon hers to forbid the summons, saying at the same time,—

“Pray, Mrs. Masham, do not call any one. I wish to speak with you alone—quite alone, on some very painful business of mine.”

Mrs. Masham's smiling face instantly became very solemn and alarmed, one conjecture succeeding another as to what the young gentleman's business could be with her. “Ruth certainly was concerned some way ;” for almost every thought of Mrs. Masham's, which was not given to the creditable conduct of the “Rosebush,” was connected with Ruth—her darling Ruth. As soon as Mrs. Masham could collect her affrighted senses, she begged that Cecil would step into her private room, where they would be free from interrup-

tion. When they had entered the little sanctum Cecil took his seat with his back to the light.

"I am here, Mrs. Masham," said Cecil, after two or three ineffectual attempts to speak. "I am here to claim a distant relationship with you—or at least, a family connection."

"Indeed, sir;" exclaimed Mrs. Masham. "You surprise me, if you are not joking, sir."

"I wish I could feel merry enough to do that," answered Cecil; "but I fear I have too much cause for sorrow,"—he added, after a pause, not daring to use the shameful word which had striven for utterance.

"I must ask you to speak plainer, sir, if I am to understand you. And Ruth's school will be over in a quarter of an hour, when she will come here." Mrs. Masham was determined to know at once if her daughter was in any way concerned in Cecil's revelation.

"You will pardon my hesitation I am sure," he said, "when I tell you that I am the son of one who I fear does not stand very well in the estimation of yourself and others."

Cecil saw that Mrs. Masham's rosy face became paler and paler as she looked at him ; but after he had borne her scrutiny for a few moments, her colour returned, as though she had not found one lineament of his to resemble those she had sought. Cecil guessed as much ; for he knew he was singularly unlike his father in form and feature ; but this intimation of the certainty of coming evil almost deprived him of the power of utterance. Mrs. Masham was perplexed to understand the emotion displayed by her visitor, and she said, after a long pause :—

“I know but one man who could possibly have anything in common with you and me, and whose wicked conduct has gained him an evil name : but you are unlike him, quite unlike him.”

“I know I am,” said Cecil, scarcely above a whisper.

“You know the man I speak of, then,” said Mrs. Masham, rising. “You know Jacob Hartley !”

“Yes, I am his son,” replied Cecil aloud, he

could say no more from his fear of what he believed was to follow.

“Then why are you here, sir?” said Mrs. Masham, her eyes flashing as she spoke. “Why are you here in this room which is all of home that your father has left me and my child. He ruined my husband—killed him, I might say, and drove my child to daily drudgery when she should have held up her head with the best in the land. Why have you come here, sir?”

“To learn what no one else will tell me—to know what wrong you and others have suffered at my father’s hands, that I may, if possible, compel him to make restitution.”

“Restitution!” said Mrs. Masham. “What restitution? Can he bring back my husband from his grave; can he restore the peace he has destroyed, or make amends for the shame and suffering endured by me and my darling Ruth? No, sir, let him keep his wicked gains. I would accept neither his money nor repentance if that is what you have come to offer.”

“I have come to offer neither, Mrs. Masham. I

am here a miserable son, who heard for the first time yesterday that my father was so badly esteemed—that his name was a bar to the ordinary civilities of life being extended to me. I am told you know his wretched story, and I have come to implore you to tell it me, for my sake—for the sake of my dear innocent mother, whom I fear to see again with this vague knowledge of wickedness upon my mind. I must know what has been done, and what can be done to undo the consequences of the past. It would be the course she would advise—command me to follow—if she believed, as I do now, that you and others have suffered injury at my father's hands. You will tell me all, dear Mrs. Masham? You will not let it be supposed that I have been cognisant of my father's wrong-doing, and come amongst you as it were to glory in his success. Let me know the worst that I may judge what my future course must be.”

Mrs. Masham's full, womanly heart gave way, and she burst into tears, pouring forth such copious streams that it was evident, as she said

afterwards, "That she hadn't had such a cry for many a day."

The sad, disgraceful story was told after much further entreaty, and so unreserved did Mrs. Masham become, that she hesitated not to declare that it was the conviction of Mr. Wycherly, Jerry Garrett, and herself, besides a host of neighbours, that if Jacob Selwyn's will was not forged it ought to have been. She spoke lightly of her own sufferings consequent upon the loss of the money and the death of her husband; but when she referred to the changed position of her darling Ruth, her voice became tremulous and her lips quivered with emotion.

Cecil was greatly distressed at what he had heard, and it was some hours before he could bring himself to take his departure. Before he left Mrs. Masham he confided to her certain intentions for the future and some acceptable arrangements for the present, and so delighted was Mrs. Masham that she could have hugged Cecil to her bosom, and condoned all the transgressions of the father in her admiration of the son.

What will become of all that we have now recorded? It may not be difficult to guess; but as Cecil rode away from the "Rosebush," his heart much lighter—though sad enough in all truth—he met Kate Wycherly, driving in her pony chaise to call on Ruth, and she coloured deeply when she bowed to him in passing. The blood mounted into Cecil's face also, as he put an unfavourable construction on Miss Wycherly's recognition of him, and felt how much further relief it would have given him if he could have told her all that had passed between himself and Mrs. Masham.

We wonder if Ruth or her mother kept Cecil's secrets as they had promised to do?

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISIT TO A VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER AND WHO
HE PROVED TO BE.—HOW CECIL CAME TO
REMAIN AT THE ROSEBUSH.

STORY-TELLERS are not to be trusted with a secret, as they are sure to reveal it if their purpose is served by so doing, and we are no better than others of the craft.

The cold grey of a winter's early morning was gradually changing to broad daylight, and the white wood smoke rose freely from the chimney of the village schoolhouse, proclaiming to all whom it concerned, that the master was astir and preparing for his rather monotonous daily drudgery. A large yellow basin, piled up with pieces of wholesome bread, and a saucepan filled with fresh milk simmering on the small fire in the little sitting room, were the preparations for his simple

breakfast. The Dominie himself was seated at the table listening patiently and not without interest to the prolix and divaricating recital of his attendant, a middle-aged woman, concerning the delinquencies of her good-for-nothing nephew. The delinquent was Jim Perks, who had been passing the last three weeks in the county gaol, and had sent her an earnest appeal to be permitted to come and lodge with her when he should be at large again, in order that he might have a very doubtful chance of once more earning an honest crust, a quality of food of which he had not partaken very largely for some time past.

Mrs. Fielder was only a morning attendant at the school-house, receiving a shilling a week in money and the education of two stupid boys as remuneration for her services; and therefore this proposition of her disreputable nephew or as not difficult of accomplishment, as Mr. Fielder her husband had no objection to anything in particular, provided he had his meals regularly, and was allowed to go to bed at eight o'clock. The

reasons for hesitation on the part of Mrs. Fielder were twofold.

Firstly, would anybody employ her nephew Jim Perks, and allow him to earn his own keep ?

Secondly, would he be likely to bring discredit upon her and her boys who were promised work when the summer came on ? On those two points she wanted the Dominie's advice.

"Poor fellow !" he said in reply, "he was once an honest lad enough, but fell into bad hands, as others did also." And here his eye glanced to a rude portrait of a lady (painfully mediæval in outline, and evidently the work of an amateur) which hung over the mantel piece, and bearing a faint resemblance in the rosiness of its cheeks, the blueness of the eyes, and the nut-brown colour of the hair to Hester Masham, *née* Mereweather.

"It would be a Christian act to help the poor fellow to a better course of life," continued the Dominie, "and I think we might manage amongst us to keep him from starving for a time."

This munificent gentleman was in the receipt of threepence a week from each of about forty pupils,

the honorarium not paid with great regularity during the winter quarter. He had, however, in addition, the free use of the school-house, and the interest of fifty pounds lodged in the hands of Mr. Wycherly, who cleverly contrived, to the confusion of the schoolmaster, to make five per cent. on that capital amount annually to five pounds and a goose at Christmas.

“La, sir,” said Mrs. Fielder, as she poured out steaming milk upon the absorbent bread, “I couldn’t think of letting you pay nothing, considering how hard you work and how little you get for it.”

“Well,” interrupted the Dominie, “we will not discuss that matter just now. If Fielder has no objection to have the poor fellow home, perhaps a little sympathy may go as far as a little money towards reclaiming poor Jim.”

Mrs. Fielder had no idea what the thing was which the Dominie thought might go as far as money, but having the highest respect for his judgment and learning, she only answered; “Well, sir, we’ll make the ’speriment, and let’s hope good ’ll

come on it,"—and then left the schoolmaster to make his breakfast in peace.

The schoolmaster was a man about forty years of age, with a good kindly face and light sandy hair, the right side of which was lined with numerous black streaks, its proprietor having habituated himself to use that side of his head as a pen-wiper. His figure was far from robust, but slight as it was, it appeared to be somewhat too large for the pepper and salt suit which encased it. There was nothing else approaching the ridiculous about the village Dominie, although few of the faded *belles* of Hilltown would readily have recognised the former proprietor of the 'Emporium of Fashion', Jeffery Garrett. He evidently wielded the ferule mildly, as his rustic subjects greeted him with grins as they doffed their caps on entering the school, crowding in turns around the blazing wood fire for a warm, before beginning their simple studies, at which we will leave them until eleven o'clock, when the postman opened the schoolroom door, and delivered a post-paid letter for Mr. Jeffery Garrett.

So few—so very few of late years had been the Dominie's correspondents, that the receipt of the letter set his heart in a flutter, the superscription not being in the handwriting of Mr. Wycherly, (the goose and interest had arrived weeks before) and the characters were really feminine. Had he ever seen them before, or was the motto and device on the seal—the good old ship and legend “Such is life”—familiar to him? Why did he turn the letter over and over, reading the post-mark ‘Hilltown’ more than twice or thrice half aloud, and then place the letter before him upon his desk, unopened? Why did he in correcting a sum of stupid Billy Fielder, make twice seven nineteen, and carry two to the edification of that little booby? And why did he at last exclaim “Boys, you may go home—and perhaps, you may as well have a half holiday.”

Not one dissentient voice was heard to this unexpected suggestion of Muster Garrett, and with a rapidity hardly to be expected from those infant bumpkins, the schoolroom was cleared and Jeffery left alone with his letter.

His hand trembled slightly as he broke the seal, and a dim haze came between his eyes and the unfolded paper as he began to read what follows :—

“THE ROSEBUSH INN, *Tuesday.*

“DEAR COUSIN GARRETT,

“It is so long since we have met or heard from each other, that you will no doubt be surprised to receive a letter from me after such a long silence, but I have had so much trouble and sorrow, and so many things to occupy almost every hour of the day, that I have had neither the spirits nor the time to write even to such an old *friend* as you are.” Why had she underscored *friend*? She had told him they were only to be ‘friends’ years ago, and he had never forgotten her words—never. “I have heard of you now and then from Miss Wycherly, who has never made any difference since our loss, in her conduct to my dear darling Ruth; God bless her for it! You will be glad I am sure to know that Ruth has a very nice school now; more than twenty scholars, and as she

can teach music and French—(thanks to Miss Wycherly)—she gets very well paid by some.”

Jeffery was glad to hear of her success, and more especially as her threepences might possibly be shillings, some people value the instructor’s labours so highly.

“It is not about dear Ruth that I wanted to write to you ; but I am sure you will excuse a mother’s feelings, as you were always so kind and goodnatured and liked by every one.”

Why does a great tear fall ‘splot’ upon the open page, as though there was an old spring in Jeffery’s heart which had not dried up during all the past solitary hopeless years which he had passed in the village schoolhouse ?

“I have just heard some good news which will please you as much as it has done me, and I hope you will act as I have done, and receive it willingly when I have told you what it is.

“A gentleman called upon me a few days ago, and after asking me ever so many questions about our family—I mean our *own* family, Uncle Selwyn, and you, and my poor Peter—” Jeffery

made a full stop and counted four, although there was not any attempt at punctuation in the whole letter—"who died, as you know, broken hearted ; well, after he had talked and inquired a great deal, he said, calling me by my name, Mrs. Masham, I have come to discharge a debt of honour due to your Uncle Selwyn, but as he is dead and gone, I must ask you to let me pay you and your cousin Jeffery, what I am not able to pay your good uncle,—and then the upshot of it was this : he said he could not pay all that is due to us at once, but he shall send it by 52*l.* a year to you if I will consent to receive the money for you, and promise never to mention his name should I ever find it out.

"Of course you will not refuse to take the money, as I shall not when it is brought to me, and I think it will be better to let me send it 5*l.* at a time, than give it you in a lump, as I know of old how soft-hearted you are, and how little you care for yourself if other people are in need. I wish you would come some day and see us, and if you would say when, I would send our light-

cart and meet you half-way. You know you have been often asked, and would always have been welcome. Hoping you are in good health as this leaves me and Ruth at present,

“ Believe me,

“ Your old and true *friend* and cousin,

“ HESTER MASHAM.”

No wonder, after reading this long letter, that Jeffery, without waiting for his dinner, went out for a long walk, rejoicing over his new fortune, and marvelling who could be the giver of it; sorrowing also over his old love, well remembering who had created and destroyed it. Nor was Jim Perks, lying in the county gaol, altogether forgotten; and had it not been for him, perhaps, Jeffery would have felt so rich that he might have resigned the drudgery of the school, and so lost the opportunity of doing a great good, which brought about the happiness of his old age.

The secret of Mrs. Masham's demonstrativeness when parting from the son of her dead husband's enemy, is now explained, but whether she was

equally communicative to Ruth and Kate Wycherly, during the long conversation which they held together in the little sanctum, must remain a matter of conjecture. Whatever had been the subject which had detained Kate more than an hour beyond the time she usually devoted to her visits to Ruth, it had evidently produced a seriousness not usual with her, and the speed at which she drove home was an indication that she was more occupied with her own reflections, than with a considerateness for the comfort of her favourite pony.

As Kate invariably communicated all her acts, almost all her thoughts, to her father, she informed him, as they sat at their light supper, of her visit to the Rosebush, and her accidental meeting with Cecil Hartley, laying more stress somewhat on the incident than might have appeared to have been absolutely necessary.

"I thought this frost would have sent that young gentleman back to London," said Mr. Wycherly, rather unkindly. "We can get on very well here without any of his name."

“You seem to have taken a strange dislike to Mr. Hartley, papa,” remarked Kate. “The little we have seen of him hardly justifies you in your unfavourable opinion, does it?”

“He comes of a bad strain, and I have faith in blood, Kate, whether horse or man. He must have known something of his father’s proceedings down here, and it would have been more to his credit to have kept clear of the neighbourhood.”

“Mrs. Masham is of opinion that he has been kept entirely in ignorance of all that has past. He did not even know of his family connection with Ruth and her mother,” interposed Kate, very softly.

“He knows now, I suppose?” asked Wycherly, sharply.

“I believe he does, from Mrs. Masham; and she appears to have formed a very high regard for him, from what took place after the discovery,” replied Kate, speaking as gently as before.

“Well, that’s Mrs. Masham’s affair, not ours,” said Wycherly, not knowing what further objection to urge. “I suppose he will not be very

proud of his family connection—I mean with his rogue of a father—but get back to London at once.”

“He returns to London the day after to-morrow,” replied Kate—adding after a pause—“so I believe.”

“So much the better,” said Wycherly, putting on his spectacles, and proceeding to turn over the County paper, which Kate knew he had read from end to end after breakfast.

Kate looked very serious, as though she was pained at her father’s remarks, showing, as they did, that he could be unjust upon occasion, and condemn the innocent for an unavoidable connection with the guilty.

When Frank Lockyer had heard nearly all which had passed at the Rosebush, he strove to comfort his unhappy friend, and Cecil was most unhappy. He had long suspected from many trivial indications, that his father was held in light esteem by many men with whom he had come in contact, and he knew that his mother’s life had not been a happy one. True she had

had her heart bruised again and again by the hand of Death, but there was a sorrow always present with her when she should have been comforted by the presence of her husband. She rarely spoke of him when absent—never with disrespect; but a mother's tongue is rarely silent to her children concerning their father's virtues. The willing bread-winner striving daily to convert the wants of home into enjoyments, has but scant leisure to educe the affection of his children, and it is from a mother's lips that they must learn how dear they are to him, whose ceaseless labour is one long effort of enduring love. Cecil's mother had some great secret cause for silence, or her loving, patient, honourable nature would not have permitted her to wrong her husband, by her unvarying reticence of all which usually forms the sweetest talk of home.

As Cecil grew in years he became painfully sensible that there was a shadow always in their house, and he feared to discover the cause. Had he learned it now? Had his father's cruel treatment of his cousins become known to his mother?

Had the vague hints of greater wrong to them than enforcing his claims upon them with the hardest pressure of the law, reached his mother's ears also? Could such suspicion be justified by the slightest show of evidence? What terrible doubts? What terrible anticipations begotten by them! Might not his father's wickedness, like some hidden evidence of murder long ago committed, be brought to light when least expected, and blight his young life when at the happiest? It had done so, in part, already, although Frank Lockyer tried to reassure him by the kindest words that ever were spoken by friend to friend. Cecil strove to accept the comfort which was proffered, but another voice heard only by him, whispered, 'His sin will find him out,' and the power of the charmer availed nothing.

Strange to say Cecil slept calmly throughout the succeeding night, his dreams being pleasant phantasies, but he awoke unrefreshed and possessed with a quickened sense of all that he had learned and lost.

He could not conceal his distress when at the

breakfast-table, and Mr. and Mrs. Lockyer fortunately attributed his depression to the prospect of quitting the Lodge.

"You have certainly been unfortunate in the weather," said the host; "and I have been kept in-doors by this —— gout." (Dashes are said to be symptoms of the disorder.) "However, should the weather break shortly, run down and spend another week with us."

Cecil thanked him for his kindness, but felt that the acceptance of it for the time to come would be impossible.

"Do you care to ride with me to the Rose-bush?" asked Cecil, when Frank and he had sauntered into the garden.

"Yes," replied Frank, not appearing to notice the doubt implied in Cecil's question. "I shall be delighted, old boy; and I hope this fresh, sharp wind will blow some of your good spirits back again. Come, we will be off at once, as I fancy those clouds yonder may favour us with snow should the wind drop a little."

The old road was traversed again. Through

Pemberton Wood first of all; and Cecil recalled almost every incident, every thought of his first ride: the lane and the covert where they met on the day of the great run, and the country they had crossed came back to him as though seen in a panorama. Sorrow is so fantastic in her humours! But his first visit to the Rosebush Inn was mingled with the last, and he became conscious only of the cruel present, and all its shame and sorrow.

If anything could have restored Cecil's self-respect it should have come at the welcome he received from Mrs. Masham. She took both his hands when he entered, and pressed them warmly, looking into his face with forgiveness, almost lovingness in her own, and then, quite disregarding Frank Lockyer, led Cecil into the little parlour, saying,—and every word had the ring of truth—"I am so glad you have come again before you left for London. I was afraid I might have spoken too plainly, Mr. Hartley."

"Not in the least, but call me Cecil," he said, with a sad smile. "Will you, aunt?"

"Indeed—indeed I will if you desire it," and Mrs. Masham's eyes twinkled with pleasure.

"I came," said Cecil, "to reassure myself that I had not lost all claim to respect, and to thank you once again for what you have said to me, and what you have promised to undertake in my behalf."

"The letter is written and sent," replied Mrs. Masham. "You and Mr. Lockyer,—whom I have left to take care of himself, by the bye—must stay and have lunch with me and Ruth."

"With cousin Ruth?" said Cecil, smiling.

"Yes, with cousin Ruth, if you like to call her so." And then Mrs. Masham went in pursuit of Frank, returning with him just as Ruth, released from her duties in the little school, entered from the garden.

Cecil and his new cousin greeted each other heartily, and Frank was equally well received, though with a blush, which, considering how much older an acquaintance Frank was than cousin Cecil, seemed to be an unnecessary addition to the ceremony.

Mrs. Masham had invited her visitors to 'lunch,' but quite a little dinner made its appearance in about half-an-hour; and being served on the best crockery, kept for private use, there was not a sniff of *the* Rosebush proper about the affair. Frank Lockyer was as respectful and attentive to pretty Ruth as he could have been had she been the heiress of Old Court; and it must be confessed that at times the young gentleman had exercised a shade more freedom than he would have done, possibly, had Ruth been more on an equality with him in social estimation.

Two hours or more had passed pleasantly enough, when the wind lulled, and the snow fell as Frank had predicted. There was nothing for it, however, but to button up closely and face the storm.

"Good bye, Cousin Ruth," so Cecil said, kissing her hand. "Good bye, Aunt Hester," kissing her cheek, and receiving a smile in return. "I may not see you again for some time, I'm afraid; but I will come as soon as I can bring myself."
—He paused.

“What an odd speech, Cecil,” said Frank, laughing, but noticing that his friend appeared confused if not distressed, he added: “And in the mean time I will do myself the pleasure of keeping the family informed of your health and proceedings—that is, if Mrs. Masham permits me the *entrée* of the parlour sanctum. Now mount, Cecil, before the snow buries the horses.”

“Good bye! good bye!” How often have those words been spoken when return seemed certain, and have proved the last kindly utterances between friends and loved ones! What comfort would those words have brought had they been uttered before death removed those whom some petty strife had kept apart! Good bye is a solemn, hopeful, forgiving valediction; and never let good friends part with it unsaid.

As the two friends rode forward, the snow fell in large flakes, almost blinding both horse and rider. They had not proceeded a quarter of a mile when a cur dog rushed out of a cottage

garden, and barking furiously, made Cecil's horse start and swerve considerably. As the animal's feet were balled with the snow, it fell on its side with considerable force, Cecil's leg beneath it. The horse was soon upon its feet again; not so his rider, for when Cecil attempted to rise he found that his leg was powerless and very painful.

"I'm afraid you are hurt," said Frank, dismounting instantly.

"I am certain of it, my dear boy," replied Cecil, with a very feeble smile; "my leg is broken, I fancy, for I cannot move, and there's no doubt about the pain."

Too true. Cecil's leg was fractured; and he was borne back, by Frank and two other men, to the Rosebush, to await the arrival of a surgeon.

Mrs. Masham and Ruth were in great distress, and wept plenteously; but Cecil affected to think lightly of the matter, and to derive consolation from the accident occurring within hail of the Rosebush.

"How lucky this should have happened so near to your house, Aunt Hester. That's a great comfort, you know," said Cecil, making a desperate effort to conceal his pain.

"That certainly was a comfort," Mrs. Masham said, "for you may be sure of good nursing. The chintz room has a look out over the valley to Hilltown ;" adding cheerfully. "As you will have to keep your bed for some time, it will be pleasant to see the old church in the distance."

The surgeon proved to be skilful and expeditious, and Cecil was soon as comfortable as a man with a broken leg and at a wayside inn could expect to be. Had he had a mind at ease he would have cared little for the physical suffering: the pain indeed serving for awhile to divert his thoughts from the constant consideration of his father's censurable proceedings, now known to him for the first time.

Frank Lockyer would not hear of leaving Cecil ; and having dispatched a messenger to the Lodge for necessaries, took up his quarters at the "Rosebush," occupying the adjoining room to Cecil's,

but having another prospect. His bed room window commanded a full view of Ruth's little academy, including the chair occupied by the fair professor.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. HARTLEY DISPLAYS HIS PARENTAL SOLICITUDE IN AN EXTRAORDINARY MANNER, AND JIM PERKS MAKES PREPARATION FOR GOING TO AMERICA.

MR. SELWYN HARTLEY had been immediately informed of the accident to his son, and by return of post a letter arrived from that excellent parent. It was dated from his place of business near Gutter Lane, and requires to be given *in extenso*:—

“DEAR CECIL,

“MR. LOCKYER’S favour of the 15th inst. is duly to hand. I cannot imagine how you could have been so foolish as to venture on horseback during such weather as we have had lately. The frost has been severe enough to burst all our

water-pipes, and the snow has choked up all the gutters both here and at Suburban Square. I think you ought to consider yourself fortunate that you have only broken a leg, and not two or three of your ribs as well; and I suppose there will be a pretty stiff bill with the doctor as it is. I am glad that your friend Lockyer is with you, as it is impossible for me to leave business just at the end of the season, when so many of our clients are wanting to clear off stock, and I have no one I can depend upon but myself to negotiate delicate transactions which turn up daily. I must make hay whilst the sun shines. I hope you are comfortable where you are, though country inns are not always the best places to be bed-ridden at. You will write every other day, and let me know how you are; but I suppose things must take their course, and you won't find much change for the better for a week or so. If you want any money, ask Mr. Lockyer to let you have £5 or £10, and I will pay him again, as I do not like sending money by the post, and I suppose a cheque would be of no use where you are. By the

bye, *mind you don't write to your mother what has happened*, or I shall have her whining and fidgeting to come down to you, which can do no good, and will only upset the house at home, and I've got a small dinner-party of some of my best buyers coming off in a day or two, when I can see my way to nailing a new man from Bristol. I shall tell her you have been pressed to stop at Lockyer's, as the frost has spoiled your hunting—that's true enough, you know. You can write in about a week, and tell her you and your friend are going somewhere—any place will do, as her geography is rather shy, and I can make her believe anything. I don't want her to leave home, you understand, as servants always take advantage of missus' absence, and spoil the dinner as well as the breakfast, which are my two principal meals. I found that out when two of the little ones—I forget which—were ill with scarlet fever at school, and I made up my mind she shouldn't leave home without me again. So you must bamboozle [the old lady a little."

Cecil crushed the letter in his hand, saying aloud, "I shall do no such meanness—no such wickedness! Poor, dear mother!"

There were only two or three lines more to be read:—

"As you won't be likely to hunt again this season, and as two purse-proud humbugs of the S. H. chose to cut me the last time I was out, I shall sell your horse to a man who is very sweet upon him, and I rather fancy he is about throwing a splint on his right fore leg.

"Yours always,

"SELWYN HARTLEY."

"P.S. (*Confidential.*)—If you can find out that Lockyer's people are speculating in Manchester goods, let me know. I think I could put a few lots or so into them if they are buyers."

Cecil's disgust at this epistle was very great, and he thrust the paper beneath his pillow to hide it away, as though it were some unsightly thing that should offend no other eyes than his own.

Frank had left the room during Cecil's perusal of the letter, and when he returned he was shocked to see the look of sorrow in the face of his friend.

"Your father I am afraid is greatly distressed at your accident," said Frank, anxiously.

Cecil shook his head, and turned away as he answered "No!"

"Your mother perhaps is unduly alarmed," said Frank. "If it will be any relief to you, Cecil, I will go to town at once and see her. Perhaps I had better do so?"

Cecil held out his hand and pressed Frank's, saying, "Thanks, dear old friend; but that must not be done at present. My father desires that she may be kept in ignorance of what has happened—for a day or two. I shall comply with his request until I can write myself to her, as I fear the consequences should she believe me incapable of writing."

"Then why not let me go? I would break it to her very gently——"

"It is not any fear on that account. She has

known too much sorrow to be greatly moved by such a common occurrence as this," interrupted Cecil. "But—she loves me so well, dear Frank, that she would wish to come to me—to be my nurse." The words came from him painfully and slowly.

"And why should she not?" asked Frank.
"What could be better?"

"Nothing," answered Cecil, "if my father were not the selfish, cruel man that I now know him to be! I will not ask you to read this letter—it is too humiliating to me—too discreditable to him who wrote it; and her natural desire to come to her only son would subject her, I am sure, to more of that brutality which has already bruised her loving heart. O Frank! there are words which strike harder than blows—ruffianly words, which leave no outward marks of injury, but which kill slowly and surely, though the victim smiles whilst she is dying. God direct me in what I ought to do." Cecil covered his face with his arms, and breathed heavily.

"We must not talk further now, old boy," said

Frank softly. "You will excite yourself too much, and perhaps do injury. In a day or two you will be able to write to your mother,—until then you must accept of me for your nurse, under correction of Mrs. Masham and pretty Ruth. Come, pitch this cruel father overboard for to-day. I shall take a turn round the bowling-green, and expect to find you composed and comfortable when I return."

Frank advised his friend very judiciously, for the excitement he had already undergone increased the slight fever which had been consequent on his accident, and retarded his communication to his mother a day or two longer than would have been the case otherwise.

When he was well enough to be propped up in his bed a letter from his mother was given to him, in which she affectionately reproached him for not writing to her, and complaining that new friends should cheat her of all his thoughts and intercourse.

Poor mother ! If she had known how constantly she was present to him—how whenever he was

alone he held communion with her on her wrongs and sorrows, she would have believed—not that he loved her more—that was impossible, but that all the filial love she had thought buried in her children's graves was living in his bosom.

He wrote to her at last—a cheerful letter making light of the pain he had suffered and speaking confidently of the cure that was perfecting, carefully avoiding the mention of Mrs. Masham's name, in case his mother might have some painful recollection awakened by it. This letter he enclosed in a brief one to his father, declaring his determination not to conceal longer his condition from his mother, and requesting that the matter might be broken to her as gently as possible before his own communication was delivered. How Mr. Selwyn Hartley performed this delicate mission we have now to learn.

“How strange that Cecil has not written home for nearly a week,” said Mrs. Hartley, as she and her husband sat down to dinner. “Have you heard from him?”

“Yes,” answered Hartley. “Now, Mary, take

off the cover. Fried soles, eh? Next time let us have them boiled, my dear."

"You said the other day you liked them better——"

"So I did then, but we'll have them fried for a change, if you please. You like the tail, I believe?" and Mr. Hartley made a very unfair division of the fish. "P'tater, Mary; not mashed I hope."

"The potatoes are so bad just now——"

"Not in the p'tater cans," observed Mr. Hartley, abruptly; "there's a man at the corner of the square selling 'em as big as my fist, and as mealy as balls of flour. I don't know how it is, but you never can get a p'tater cooked properly at home, never. If I kept house I should get over that difficulty before I went crotchying and maccas-saring."

"My crotchying," said Mrs. Hartley, smiling, "is confined to holes in stockings and——"

"Why?" asked Hartley, with his mouth full. "I brought home half-a-dozen new pairs not three weeks ago—some of a first-rate lot."

“They were very bad ones,” replied Mrs. Hartley, “they have washed into holes——”

“Then change your washerwoman—uses some of those beastly powders, I’ll be sworn. Take away, Mary,” and Mr. Hartley applied himself to his toothpick.

“What’s to follow? Boiled mutton. Got plenty of turnips, I hope.”

“There were none to be had, owing to the frost and——”

“Then why did you have boiled mutton? Nothing without turnips. You ought to know that by this time. Any caper sauce? Oh, there it is. Chopped up the capers of course? No, for a wonder. Why the meat’s as red as beet-root.”

“It is only the gravy and this cold weather——”

“Only gravy; don’t tell me that—Well it seems to be gravy, and that’s a stroke of luck, I consider,” said Mr. Hartley, applying himself silently and vigorously to the business of the moment.

There was no tart, as he did not care for pastry, and nothing to be said against the Stilton, which

he had bought himself and required to be kept for his own consumption.

When the cloth was removed and a pint of sherry placed upon the table—Mrs. Hartley did not take wine, not liking sherry—Mr. Hartley spread himself out before the fire and mused for a few minutes.

“Things are precious queer in the City,” he said at length. “One or two smashes to-day ;—Dobbs and Dust the tea dealers gone,—thought they were shaky last week by coming to me in such a hurry. Just try what that stuff’s like, when we have tea,” and he took a little blue paper packet from his pocket and threw it on the table. Again he relapsed into thought.

Mrs. Hartley all this time was thinking of her darling boy Cecil, yet fearing—why should she have done so ?—to ask what his father had heard from him. Mr. Hartley evidently guessed at the cause of her silence, so he said :

“ You asked before dinner if I had heard from Cecil and I told you, yes I had, but as I did

not want to spoil my dinner I didn't say what I had heard."

"O Selwyn, what has——"

"Now please to keep quiet, and don't cry out before there is an occasion for it. Cecil has been playing the fool, and like other fools has to pay the penalty."

"What is the matter?" said Mrs. Hartley, in a tone which seemed to demand an answer.

"He has met with an accident," replied Hartley, filling his glass, "broken something—his leg I believe; but there's a letter to you which came yesterday, and I suppose he has told you all about it. It's very unfortunate just now, very, as I could have used him on some very particular business."

Mrs. Hartley heard nothing of the latter portion of her husband's speech, as she had opened Cecil's letter, and was reading it as well as her streaming eyes would permit her to see the words.

"And you have known of this for nearly a week, Selwyn," she said, "and never told me. How very cruel of you!"

"Cruel! I wish some one would keep all my troubles from me, Mrs. Hartley. What on earth is the use of your crying in that way? Tears won't mend broken bones; but you like to be miserable."

"Like to be miserable!" repeated Mrs. Hartley. "I have had no choice in the matter, Selwyn; but God's will be done! I say again it was cruel of you to keep this knowledge to yourself, knowing that our only son was lying in pain, and danger perhaps, with no one near him that could nurse or care for him as I should do. Where is this place that he is lying? Can I get there to-night?"

"No, nor to-morrow either, Mrs. Hartley, with my consent. He's well cared for I dare say."

"Not go to him?" cried Mrs. Hartley, her mother's love rousing her into rebellion. "Not go to him, unfeeling man, even you shall not prevent me if I have to walk the journey. Cecil, my dear, dear Cecil! I can no more obey you, in this matter, Selwyn, than I could in the wickedest thing you could propose to me. Where is this

place? Surely I have heard of it at some time. I remember it is near Hilltown, near where your Uncle Selwyn lived. Why don't you speak to me? Why don't you answer me?"

Had she seen her husband's face pale as death, his lips apart, and his eyes wide open, gazing into the fire, she would have guessed that some more powerful motive than her anger and her reproaches kept him silent.

"This is a matter," she said, after a pause, "in which I have a right to act for myself, and I am sure you will not object to my going to-night if possible—if not, to-morrow morning, to our son. Remember Selwyn, that by our children's death-beds I have been the only watcher, and you never denied me the right to exercise my solemn duty. You will not interpose now between me and my right to go to my son—to your son. Do you consent?"

"I have already told you my wish," said Hartley hoarsely. "I don't want you to go into that neighbourhood, as there's no necessity."

"No necessity!"

"Well, don't be violent, I beg of you. You've said one or two nasty things which I shan't forget in a hurry. Go, if you will, in the morning, madam!"

She hardly knew what she had said; but for that she cared nothing, now she could go to her darling Cecil.

"Thanks, Selwyn," she answered, and rose to make preparations for her journey.

"Don't thank me," said Hartley, "my consent is forced from me, and I hope you won't have cause to repent of your obstinacy. Your son seems to be a deal more considered than his father who has to find board and lodging for the lot. But no matter. I dare say I shan't be starved by the servants, and if I find no comfort at home, why, I suppose I must look for it out of doors." He sat silent for some time, expecting an answer; but when he looked round over his shoulder, he found that Mrs. Hartley had left the room. He instantly faced about to the table, and drank off two or three glasses of wine rapidly.

"She will go," he thought, "she will go, that's certain, and may perhaps hear something of old times, as Cecil may have done. Well, suppose they do, what should I care? She—is—my wife," he muttered, pausing on each word, "and will keep her tongue quiet whatever she may think of my conduct. As for Cecil, I have thought of his future career, and if he's too much of a gentleman to follow it, he can shift for himself, that's all. She won't have to go to Hilltown; the branch station is two or three miles from it, and as no one knows her she may come back only as wise as she went." He finished the small decanter, but as the wine was not of a very generous nature, he subsequently supplemented it with a strong glass of brandy and water, and then went to bed. Mrs. Hartley preferred to sleep in the nursery, as she had many arrangements to make for the morning.

Poor mother! unhappy wife! She knelt down by the bedside of her sleeping daughter—the one left of many taken—and sought for strength and comfort where only the weak and wretched are sure to find them.

The next morning Mr. Hartley made a very sulky breakfast, being much longer over it than ordinary. He was exceedingly dilatory and provoking afterwards, changing his boots two or three times, and giving a world of unnecessary trouble to the servants. He would give no information respecting the train until he got to the office, he said, as he was not sure there was any railway beyond Hilltown, and if women would be obstinate and have their own way, he wasn't going to be put out of his. He insisted upon having all the keys labelled, and required to be informed of the state of the tea-caddy and the cellaret. He requested also to have a full report of the cold meat in the larder, and to know if the cask of table beer had been tilted. He suddenly took an interest in the state of the chimneys, and would refer to Mrs. Hartley's housekeeping book to know when the sweeps had been last employed. Having fairly exhausted the patience of all his household, except his gentle wife, he got into the cab (which had been waiting nearly half an hour) smoking an ill-flavoured cheroot, drawing up both windows

to give Mrs. Hartley the full benefit of the fumigation.

When they arrived at the office he would open all his morning letters before referring to Bradshaw, and then affected to find that easily comprehended publication difficult of interpretation. Having ascertained the *route* Mrs. Hartley was to take, he discovered that the cab might reach the station in time for the next train, provided the cabman had luck and there were no stoppages. He sent the porter to see his wife off, and maliciously gave her two franc pieces in some loose silver which he presented to her at parting. That was all. Not one kindly remembrance to his son, until he was reminded that he had omitted such an ordinary ceremony.

“Oh yes! I’d forgot him for the moment,” he said. “Say all that’s agreeable, and tell him to get well as soon as he can, as I want him to take up a matter of business for me when he can hobble again.”

Mrs. Hartley could and would put this unfeel-

ing speech into gentle words when she saw Cecil, be sure of that.

The cabman *was* in luck, and arrived in time. Neither did he receive either of the franc pieces and thereby occasion a dispute with the lady or the attendant porter.

Hilltown was barely thirty miles from London, but Mrs. Hartley travelled by a "stopping train," and the journey of an hour and three-quarters appeared to be interminable to her whose anxious thoughts had been wandering to the Rosebush Inn all through the preceding night and early morning. Arrived at Hilltown she found that the branch train would not proceed for a quarter of an hour, and though she might have procured easy conveyance by road she was too inexperienced a traveller to avail herself of other than her prescribed means of procedure, therefore she entered the little waiting-room, and seated herself at the window looking in the direction of the place where she had ascertained her poor wounded Cecil was lying.

After a while she became conscious of the pre-

sence of a man walking to and fro on the platform outside, and who appeared to regard her with increasing interest as he passed and re-passed the window at which she was seated. The man's face appeared to be not quite unknown to her, but she could not recall where she had seen him. His dress was a shabby shooting-coat and well-worn leather leggings, his old jerry hat appeared too large for his head, the hair on which had been closely cut, his face had been cleanly shaven.

At last he stopped opposite the window, and having apparently satisfied himself of Mrs. Hartley's identity with some one he had known, he smiled and motioned her to open the window. Mrs. Hartley was not the least afraid at this singular invitation, connecting it, she knew not why, with Cecil. Having opened the little window the man touched his hat respectfully, and said, "Are you alone, ma'am—no one in the room, is there?"

"No one."

"You seem to have forgotten me, Mrs. Hartley,"

he said ; " and I don't wonder at it. I am James Perks."

" Indeed ! " exclaimed Mrs. Hartley, the man's features being instantly remembered. " Are you Mr. Perks that I knew years ago ? How changed you are ! "

" Yes, ma'am," said Jim. " The life I have lived since then and the place I have just come from changes a good many better men than me."

" Where do you come from ? " asked Mrs. Hartley.

Jim took off his hat and showed his cropped crown, as though that could answer the question, but perceiving that Mrs. Hartley did not comprehend the meaning of the exhibition, said softly :

" The gaol, ma'am," and as Mrs. Hartley rather recoiled at the announcement, he added, " and perhaps you would hardly like to be told who put me on the road to it."

Mrs. Hartley confessed her ignorance of his meaning.

" You must not take it unkind of me if I tell you an unpleasant truth, ma'am," said Jim. " But

I have been so hunted, and am likely to be again, as though I was a wild beast of prey, that I must take every chance I can find to pull myself out of my old life and get at a new one."

"Still I don't understand you, Mr. Perks."

"Mr. Perks," replied Jim, with a melancholy smile. "Ah! that was it once on a time—that was my ruin, ma'am. When I was poor Jim Perks I was thought well on and trusted as I deserved to be then. Mrs. Hartley, I don't like to worry you, but I'm almost desperate, I am, and so you must know the worst of it. You remember when Mr. Hartley used to bring me now and then to your house?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Do you know why he did so?" asked Jim, quietly but earnestly.

"No; my husband never acquaints me with his business matters."

"I thought not—I thought not," replied Jim, adding after a short pause, "nayther would I if I didn't see a chance of escape from my miserable life. I can't help what I'm going to say. It

seems as if you was sent here to-day on purpose to save me. When I used to come to your house your husband was some way in my power. I knowed of a something which he had done, and nobody but I could accuse him of it."

Mrs. Hartley became deadly pale, and Jim saw the effect his words had had upon her.

"I must speak on, ma'am, now. What I have said is Heaven's truth, ma'am, and I received a great deal of money from him to keep it a secret, and he made me swear a oath—such a oath!—never to speak of what it was to living man or woman. The money went the way of all such easy earnings, and when I tried to get more from Mr. Hartley, he taunted me with what he had done—he told me what I had sworn, and left me with a laugh almost. Well, ma'am, down and down I've gone since, and sorely have I been tempted to up and tell the secret I knowed, but there was two things stood in the way. I was afraid to break the dreadful oath I had taken, for time was, ma'am, when I had good teaching, more shame o' me to say it; and there was another

reason came, even when temptation has been almost too strong for me,—I thought that having come to what I was, nobody would take my word now, and I have nothing to show for what I had to say, and so your husband has gone on to be rich and respectable.”

“Perks, what you have told me is very terrible ; and though I cannot imagine what your secret may be, I do not think you would have invented such a wicked thing.”

Jim made an asseveration of its truth.

“What is it you want from me ?” asked Mrs. Hartley.

“A little money, ma’am,” replied Jim. “I want to get away to Ameriky, and I can’t get the money to pay my passage. If I could show to one kind friend and lady, that some one had a little faith in me, that some one beside herself did not want to see me rot in a gaol, or die on a gallows, I think she would find the way to help me too, and I should be able to get away from this cursed place and become a new man.”

“Whether your story be true or false,” said

Mrs. Hartley (poor wife ! she guessed too truly),
“you shall not perish, and leave the sin of it at
our door. Here are five pounds, if that sum will
help you.”

“It will ! it will !” replied Jim, choking with
emotion. “Not a farthing of it shall be touched
for meat or drink if I am starving. For nothing,
but to put the sea between me and this place.
God reward you, ma’am, and forgive me if I have
made you anyways unhappy, but I was so despe-
rate miserable that I could only think of myself,
and of what was before me !”

The poor fellow looked very sorrowful and
lingered at the window as though asking for a
kindly word or two. Mrs. Hartley could not speak,
oppressed as she was by what the man had said,
but she held out her hand to the silent suppliant,
and that action seemed to set his mind at ease.

“Good-bye, ma’am,” he said ; “we may never
meet again, going where I am going ; but should
Mr. Hartley ever tell you the truth, you will not
think so bad of me as some others has done ; or
think, ma’am, that this precious money has been

ill gived when you know I was true to him and what I saved him from."

Jim then placed his riches in an old moleskin tobacco-pouch, and hiding it somewhere inside his waistcoat, made a quiet bow to his benefactress and left the platform.

Five Pounds! Not a large sum, and Mrs. Hartley had saved it for some trifling present for her dear son Cecil. She had made a better investment for him by giving the money to Jim Perks.

CHAPTER X.

WYCHERLY IS SCHOOLED BY KATE AND PROVES
HIMSELF NO WISER THAN HE OUGHT TO BE.
CECIL LOSES HIS NURSE.

MEANWHILE Cecil had made new friends where he had least expected to find them. On the second morning after his accident Cecil was sleeping, and Frank had gone to his chamber overlooking the garden and little school-room of Professor Ruth. Her duties were ended for the morning, as the laughter and voices of her emancipated pupils could be heard even through the closed window. Down the cleanly swept garden-path he saw pass tripping along an agile, graceful form, snugly wrapped in a well-furred pelisse, and he recognised both as having been seen on the margin of Old Court lake, and knew them to pertain to Miss Kate Wycherly. He saw her

enter the school-room, and hastening to Ruth embrace her most affectionately. Frank, susceptible rogue ! would have given one of his ears almost to have received the half of the kisses passing between them. The weather was bitterly cold, but Frank stood in his shirt sleeves utterly regardless of it, watching the two friends now engaged in earnest talk, and wondered what the subject could be which interested them so much. Presently the two girls came into the garden, and Frank saw the earnest face of Kate turned for a moment towards the window where poor Cecil was lying and instantly divined that the conversation which had evidently interested both, had had reference to his disabled friend. There was such a look of gentle pity in Kate's face that Frank felt there was other beauty than perfectness of feature and complexion, and almost envied his friend his mishap, as it seemed to have procured for him a sympathiser like Kate Wycherly.

Frank proceeded rather deliberately to make his best possible toilet, and found, as is usual on similar occasions, that his collars were intractable,

and that his cravat was perverse. He half satisfied himself at last, and then sauntered down the stairs as though quite unconscious of the presence of Ruth's visitor. He was properly punished for his duplicity, as he only arrived just in time to pay the ordinary civilities, and hand the lady of Old Court into her little pony carriage, which he watched out of sight. Ruth and Mrs. Masham had left him to his contemplation, and retired into their sanctum (as the little parlour was now called) and as the door was closed, Mr. Frank found himself in the position of the waverer who had two stools to sit upon and missed both.

"She certainly is a charming person, that Kate Wycherly," he thought, "and gives a fellow no chance of being more than ordinarily civil. A strong contrast of character between her and her friend Ruth, who is gentleness itself. Pretty Ruth; I hope I have not offended her by my irrepressible admiration of her friend"—and the lady-killer went off to the stables to have a few minutes' conversation with his horse.

When Kate and her father were seated at dinner that day, he said,

“You made a short stay with Ruth this morning; was she ill?”

“No, papa,” replied Kate, looking at her father rather archly, “but I came away because I was afraid you might take it into your dear wise head to be angry with me if I had remained.”

“Why so?” asked her father.

“Young Hartley is staying there,” replied Kate bravely.

“Staying at the Rosebush! What impudence to take up his quarters under that roof!” said Wycherly angrily.

“It is not impudence which detains him there, papa—it is a broken leg,” replied Kate.

“What! Has the lad met with an accident?” asked Wycherly in a more kindly tone.

“Yes, papa—so Ruth told me. His horse fell with him on his return from a visit to his *Aunt Masham*.” Kate emphasized the word “Aunt” in a peculiar manner.

“Has he dared to make himself known to poor

Hester and to claim relationship? I wonder she had not turned him out of the house," said Wycherly quite in a passion again.

"On the contrary," continued Kate. "Mrs. Masham—Ruth told me—was so moved and pleased at what Mr. Hartley said to her, that she nearly threw her arms around his neck and longed to kiss him."

"Well! women are strange creatures, that's certain," said Mr. Wycherly, turning up his eyes and shaking his head.

"Yes, dear papa, they are strange and forgiving creatures, and Mrs. Masham is now nursing the son of her old enemy with all the care and almost with the love of a mother. Don't you think you ought to forgive him also, especially as he has never done anything to offend you?"

Wycherly looked in his daughter's bright enquiring face for a few moments before he answered her.

"I tell you what it is, Kate. You are getting too clever and are now taking me at a disadvantage. What on earth can I say but 'Yes?'"

“And what ought you to say but ‘Yes,’ you dear, old, darling, obstinate papa,” said Kate, rising and kissing her father fondly. “I was quite ashamed of you the other day when I heard you so unjust to one who had only been known to us by his kindness and civility. Never be so naughty any more, you dear papa,” and she kissed him again.

“I won’t—if I can help it, Kate replied Wycherly, “and I tell you what we will do—tomorrow I’ll drive you over, and call on the young fellow.”

“You shall drive me over, and *you* shall call on the young gentleman with pleasure, but if you please I will confine my visit to Ruth,” said Kate, with more than the usual colour in her face.

“Of course—that’s what I mean,” replied Wycherly; “I hope none of his own people are there?”

“None at present, though Mr. Lockyer wrote to them on the night of the accident. But you *must* go now that you have promised—the more so, as Mr. Hartley—so Ruth told me—noticed

your coolness at parting after our skating-party, and——”

“And what?”

“And that made him question Mr. Lockyer and then go to Mrs. Masham, to whom he has confided an arrangement which reflects the greatest honour upon him—so Ruth told me,”—said Kate in a strangely embarrassed manner.

“May I ask to know what it is?” enquired Wycherly.

“I don’t exactly know what it is myself,” replied Kate, “but I believe it is something for the advantage of poor Mr. Garrett.”

“Poor Jerry! Well I shall be glad to hear that something has turned up to his advantage,” said Mr. Wycherly. “I shall ask Mrs. Masham to take me into confidence. I should like to hear some good of a Hartley, too, for I’ve faith in blood, whether——”

“Papa! Papa!” cried Kate, interrupting him, “going to be naughty again?”

“No! no! Peel me an apple, whilst I look over the London paper.”

Kate did as she was bidden, nor sought to disturb her father in his pursuit of knowledge in that book of daily life—a newspaper.

Cecil, on the following day, had scarcely recovered from the excitement caused by his father's cold-blooded letter, when Mr. Wycherly requested permission to see him, and Cecil experienced a feeling of shame such as he had never known in his life before. He now knew how much reason Mr. Wycherly had had to discourage an intimacy with him, and he was perplexed to divine the object of this visit.

Mr. Wycherly attributed the flushed face and averted eyes to the painful condition of the sufferer, not guessing that Cecil was then enduring pangs which made him indifferent to the throbbing of his strained muscles and shattered bone.

"I am very grieved," said Wycherly, taking the feverish hand lying on the bed-clothes, "very grieved to find you lying here, Mr. Cecil" (he purposely avoided mentioning the name he detested so much).

"I must task my philosophy," replied Cecil with

some effort, "and believe matters might have been much worse every way."

"So they might! So they might!" said Wycherly cheerfully. "Might have broken two legs and not had this comfortable inn for an hospital."

"Yes, I might have been less fortunate. My Aunt Masham has been very kind, very." Cecil was resolved that Mr. Wycherly should not think he was willing to impose upon him any longer.

"Ah! Yes! Mrs. Masham is a good soul—a kind soul, always was!" replied Wycherly, going to the window. "Oh! a good view of Hilltown Church and the valley, I see, but rather monotonous I should fancy after a day or two."

"I have had plenty to occupy me at present," replied Cecil—"the pain of my leg, and my good friend Lockyer has only left me half an hour ago. He returns again in the evening."

"Ah, so I heard, kind young fellow that," said Wycherly, "kind and gentlemanly. You'll have some of your own people presently, I suppose?"

"Possibly my mother," replied Cecil colouring, "I expect no one else."

"Then in that case," said Wycherly quickly, "when you can get about again, Mr. Cecil, we shall be glad to see you for a week or two at Old Court, that is, if my young housekeeper Kate sees no objection."

Cecil translated these words into what he thought was their true meaning—"Come! if you and your mother can come together without the man whose name you both bear, unless he should have chosen a fitting helpmate, and that Kate's woman's instinct will readily discover." That such a doubt should be possible where his noble mother was concerned offended his filial love, and he replied :

"Thanks, Mr. Wycherly, I am not likely to tire of the Rosebush in the short time I hope to be detained here, and I have already trespassed upon your hospitality."

"Not in the least, sir! not in the least," said Wycherly, reproaching himself for his want of tact and consideration. "I am afraid I was out of

humour when we parted at Old Court, but my daughter has spoilt me by over indulgence, and I must ask you to excuse me." He then pressed the acceptance of his invitation so earnestly that he extorted half a promise from Cecil, that, when convalescent, he would become a guest at Old Court.

There was no doubt but this visit helped greatly to soothe the wounded spirit of Cecil, and Frank found a marked change for the better when he returned in the evening and heard what had occurred during his absence, mentally resolving that he would take the earliest possible opportunity of riding over to Old Court and thanking the Wycherlys for their kindness to his friend. Of course he did not suspect himself of having any other motive for the call, and the day that Mrs. Hartley started on her journey to the Rosebush, Frank presented himself at Old Court, and, to his no small mortification, found neither Kate nor her father at home.

During Frank's absence a fly from the station stopped at the Rosebush. This was no unusual

occurrence, but Mrs. Masham knew instinctively that the new comer must be the wife of her old enemy, as she was wont to call Jacob Hartley.

Mrs. Masham would have been more than woman—forgiving as good women mostly are—had she been capable of offering a sincere welcome to Mrs. Hartley. Hester knew how she had partaken of Peter's hopes and fears and the interests she had had in his outgoings and incomings not to believe that the same confidence had existed between the Hartleys, and therefore she debited the innocent wife with a full half of her husband's delinquencies. And it was not until she had remembered that the lady at the door was Cecil's mother, the one of whom he had spoken with such love and tenderness, that Hester Masham felt amiable enough to do the honours of her house with her usual politeness.

What a loving meeting between mother and son! Tears first and kisses—no words until each full heart had so relieved itself, and then Cecil made light of all his sufferings and strove to dispel his mother's fears for his future well doing.

Neither made mention of the selfish, cold-hearted father, each understanding the other's silence, and respecting each other's sorrow that there was love withheld.

As the day wore on and they sat conversing together, each became painfully conscious of a restraint in their intercourse and of a strange unusual feeling as though a cold dark shade was continually passing between them until both divined the cause, remaining alike unwilling to make the disclosure of the disgraceful secrets they had learned of late.

At length Mrs. Hartley with a burst of passionate grief narrated her interview with Jim Perks, and found to her amazement that the revelation had but slight effect upon Cecil, who then told her in softened phrases and gentle words much that he had learned of wrong to others done by him whom they were commanded by God to honour and by nature to love, who had cast from him all reverence,—and had repelled affection for the wicked greed of gain and the despicable care of self. There was a sad relief

in this exchange of humiliating confidences, and mother and son became if possible dearer to each other, believing that in the increase of their love they should be better able to bear the voluntary sorrows with which Selwyn Hartley filled his home.

Mrs. Hartley so completely realized the character which Cecil had given her, that Mrs. Masham took her to her bosom and accepted her as one of her dearest friends—whatever that may represent in the catalogue of female emotions. In woman's love we are the most orthodox of believers. Of woman's friendship we are inclined to be sceptical, especially if the professors of that sublime passion have husbands. We fear they sometimes overlook Polonius's advice to Laertes—

“ The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel ;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd comrade.”

Ruth also displayed an affectionate attention to Mrs. Hartley, but then she had had to learn

no worldly lesson, and had known no hardening sorrow beyond the child's transient grief at the death of her father. Ruth therefore had nearly all the love and tenderness of her woman's nature unapplied, and the gentle mother of cousin Cecil was instantly endowed with a part. The more so as she, poor lady, was so liberal in dispensing her own affection, as Kate Wycherly and Ruth had to endure loving recitals of Cecil's virtues, Cecil's accomplishments, Cecil's nobleness, the mother never tiring seemingly to "unpack her heart with words."

True, she was often led into these eloquent panegyries of her son by some careless word spoken by Kate perhaps, which touched the dominant chord of the mother's heart and set it sounding pæans. And more strange than the ready minstrelsy of the fond mother was the untiring patience with which Kate listened to those notes of praise as though she could have joined in chorus had such exuberant exaltation been permitted to a young lady of eighteen, when the subject was the laudation of such a young

gentleman as Cecil Hartley. Kate could have had no such thought in her mind perhaps as she had persuaded herself long ago, very long ago—a year or more (as Mr. Frank Lockyer had done more recently), that she should never marry.

Mrs. Hartley had rarely been as happy as she was now, during the long period of her wedded life. Cecil made so light of the pain which arose from his broken limb that his mother forgot there was cause for anxiety, and only rejoiced in the society of her darling boy and his kind considerate friends. Mr. Hartley might have suspected as much, and his was not a disposition to accept the happiness of others as any compensation for discomfort to himself. He wrote to Mrs. Hartley the following epistle upon a sheet of office paper, as though among other articles of commerce in which he dealt were job lots of home affections which he retailed out in very small quantities. If the annexed sample be a fair extract from the bulk, the job lot was of very inferior quality.

“ GUTTER LANE,

26/2/46.

“ D^R REBECCA,

“I have not replied to your two favours, 20th & 24th ulto., as I have been too hard worked here, and a precious deal too uncomfortable at home to have written anything pleasant to any one. I suppose you are now thinking of coming home again, as you say in your last that Cecil is going on nicely, and that the people at the public-house are very decent and attentive. *Mind*—keep a check on what you have—gruel costs very little making, and no man can do more than four basins in four-and-twenty hours; but when I had a cold at Leicester, they charged me half-a-crown a day for gruel and beef-tea. The house seems to be getting in a pretty mess, everything topsy turvy almost, but Sally Sterkins and Mary call it a *cleaning*, so I am shut up if I attempt the mildest row. Clara came home from school on Saturday as usual. I did not see her until the morning, and then I thought she looked *very dull about the eyes and*

feverish. She has also a nasty red spot on her *forehead*—pustuley-like—but Sally says it is only a pimple, and of course *she* knows, but she's not her mother, that's all I say. Clara went to school on Monday morning, and certainly appeared to be livelier. Still there's the *spot* and the tendency to *fever*, and recollect how some of our others began to get queer. Would the people at the inn buy some real Bengal sheroots—a job lot? Ask 'em—and they might go off the bill. We have also a small lot of Turkey rhubarb, if the doctor would like to have a sample. Also some Tartar emetic which is excellent, as I tried a little on our porter, and it answered wonderfully. Try the Medico, as his bill will be stiffish I expect, and I could sell both T.R. and T.E. *cheap*. I shall expect you home certainly by *the end of the next week*, as the tradesmen's books will be getting into a mess, and the washerwoman was quite insolent on Saturday. '*She* couldn't give credit.' '*She* was a poor woman, and had another poor woman to pay, and that Mrs. Hartley never *served* her so.' So you see what you get by being 'con-

siderate' as you call it. Consider yourself, that's my motto. I haven't heard anything from the school that Clara is worse, but when you write again say if our doctor shall call—I mean the one that contracts to physic our people in the warehouse—I told him I should include ourselves, unless in case of surgical operations. Ask Cecil if he sounded the Lockyers about the goods. If not, tell him to do so *prompt*—as I fancy cottons will go down. C. can easily do it with young L. if he is what you say, 'a most true and faithful friend.' I *could*, and it's time Cecil turned his *whole mind* to business. I don't think I have anything else to say, and it's ten to five, so the porter will come for the letters. Mind you write and say what I shall do about *Clara's redness on the forehead*, and be sure to come home either the middle or the end—middle for choice—of next week, as I haven't had a decent meal since you have been away.

“ I remain,

“ Dear Sir,

“ Yours truly,

“ J. SELWYN HARTLEY.

“*P.S.*—Remember me to Cecil—tell him to get well as fast as he can as I shall want him on a matter of business, and mind he don’t forget about the cottons.”

Poor Mrs. Hartley blushed and sighed by turns as she read this affectionate communication, and so did Cecil until he found his mother addressed as “Dear Sir,” and then he smiled very bitterly. As for his father’s indifference concerning his own suffering and progress Cecil cared little, but he felt a pang at his heart when he saw how lightly his mother was regarded, and found in the lines which he had just read a sad story of a wife’s endurance. He determined, if possible, to keep his dear nurse where she was evidently so happy, and he and Mrs. Masham and Ruth urged her to disregard the selfish considerations of Mr. Hartley, and remain until Cecil could return home with her.

“It could not be,” she said, shaking her head sadly; “her duties were divided, and she must do her best to discharge them all, whether she were

rewarded with such happiness as she had recently enjoyed, or with the sorrows, fears, and the neglect which had for so long been her experiences of home."

Mrs. Masham and Ruth tried vainly to alter her resolution to return to London, as Mrs. Hartley insisted that it would be only a selfish act were she to remain now that she had seen Cecil, and knew how considerately he was cared for by Mrs. Masham and his other friends.

Swiftly, too swiftly, flew the next few days, and Kate and Ruth and Hester all strove to make them happier even than those which had gone before, Frank Lockyer bearing his full share in this labour of love. And when they parted, and her pitying friends remembered how the maiden's hopes had failed to fulfil their promise to the wife and mother, they agreed to believe that such a fate as Mrs. Hartley's was an exceptional example of the ordinary chances of life, and that for them there was no such future.

CHAPTER XI.

JIM PERKS RESOLVES TO GO INTO EXILE AND MR.
GARRETT AIDS HIM TO EFFECT HIS OBJECT—
A LITTLE DINNER AND A LITTLE MUSIC.

THIS will be a very short chapter, if, indeed, it deserve to be a separate section of our story ; but as tints and half tones are needed to make the perfect picture, so is our imperfect word-painting dependent for its effects on many trivialities of incident and description.

It may for the moment appear hardly worthy of record that Mrs. Masham received, in a few days after her communication had reached her old admirer, Jerry Garrett, a reply to that welcome epistle. Hester remembered the old characters of the superscription, although she had seen them but seldom of late years, but there had been a time when a day scarcely passed without some

excuse being found for a brief note to Miss H. Mereweather from hers "most sincerely, Jeffy. Garrett."

The letter she now received was sealed with black wax, impressed by the chequered end of a pencil-case. Jerry had apparently begun to write "Dear Cousin M—," but gathering courage, we suppose, from the terms which had been applied to himself, he had altered clumsily the M into H, and written "Hester." The contents were commonplace enough, being earnest thanks to the unknown donor or debtor, and honestly confessing how much the comforts of his life would be increased by this vast addition to his income. The sentences were short and spasmodic, as though the hand had laid a constraint upon the utterances of the heart and would not allow the old love, which could not die, to betray its hiding-place.

Hester communicated the contents of the letter to one more interested in them than herself, and having done so, she proceeded to tear the paper before consigning it to the flames, but when her

eyes fell on the old familiar handwriting she paused in the act of destruction, and, after a few moments' reflection, threw the letter as it was into a writing-desk which Jerry had given to her years before.

Some four or five weeks had passed when Mrs. Masham was surprised at receiving another letter in the handwriting of Jerry Garrett. The first letter had been received as a matter of course, but this new comer was really a surprise and a small perplexity, as the seal bore upon it the blazonry of a pair of open scissors, and the legend, "We part to meet again."

"Dear me!" thought Hester, colouring very slightly, "I gave him that seal twenty years ago!"

Whether it was that recollection, or any speculation as to the contents of the letter, which made her look so long at the seal before it was broken, we are not inclined to enquire, but Hester gave a very little sigh as she tore away the paper from around the wax without destroying the impression.

There was much in what Jerry had written to interest Hester, and prove to her that he was the same soft-headed unselfish fellow that he had ever been, and as the letter only explained in part the causes which had led to its production, we will return for a short time to Mr. Garrett's school-house.

"He's comed, sir," said Mrs. Fielder, as she poured out the Dominie's morning tea—he had allowed himself that luxury now that he had become such a rich man—"He's comed, sir—comed last night."

"Who has come, Mrs. Fielder?" asked Jerry, in his usual mild manner.

"Why him I spaked about, sir. My nevey Jim Perks, and I declares to you, sir, I'm quite ashamed of him!" said Mrs. Fielder, exhibiting to Jerry the palms of her not overclean hands.

"Well, he is not a person to be very proud of, I know," replied Jerry, "but he was a good lad once, and may be sorry for the past."

"O, it's not that axactly that I means now,

sir," said Mrs. Fielder, "it's his looks—they've quite scraped his face, and cut his hair down to the quick, as you may say, and might as well have painted county gaol on him, he looks so unnataral."

Jerry did not care for the man's appearance, he said, the great question was, whether he intended to do right for the future, and it was then that Mrs. Fielder, having rolled her arms up in her apron, either for warmth or concealment, proceeded, in a very roundabout narrative, to acquaint Jerry with the determination of her nephew, Jim, to get out of the country as fast as he could, and the only obstacle to the completion of this good resolution was the want of sufficient funds to carry him over the broad Atlantic.

"There is a lady has bore a good will to Jim, but her father had been the means of putting him in gaol for poaching his game, and it wasn't likely she'd help him now—unless, may be, a friend could be got to spake to her, and there was no one more likely than Miss Ruth Masham who was a great fav'rite at Old Court."

Jim had not told his Aunt all he knew about his own affairs. He had said nothing of the £5 note which Mrs. Hartley had given him, but when he had had a long evening's talk with Jerry, and had moved that soft-hearted person to promise to write to Mrs. Masham in his behalf, Jim honestly told him of his interview with "another lady" at the station, and of the money which she had given to him. He did not mention her name, as somehow or the other the word stuck in his throat when he tried to give it expression in the hearing of Jerry Garrett.

As Jim walked home in the bright moonlight that night, he remembered the old poaching song which he had sung so often drunk and sober, and some lingering feeling for the old life came over him for a moment, and so disturbed him that his forehead became warm and damp despite the cold frosty air.

"I must get away! I will, too, someway or the other," he muttered, "or my life will be a sad one if I stay. If I get among my old pals I'm not safe, I'm sure on't, and then gaol and gaol agen

until a man gets desperate. Besides," he stopped and leaned his back against a gate by the roadside, "besides, if I was gettin' honest bread again I couldn't eat it here—knowin' what I know has been done, when a word from me would have given others their rights. That's past all, and too late; but I should be always seein' 'em, and thinkin' what a great rogue me and him has been—tho' he seems prosperin' enough, and is happy enough. Only to think," he continued, after a pause, "that I should be obliged to come to them two—Jeffery Garrett and Peter Masham's wife—to help me away from the consequences of the wicked thing I have done to them! O! what a bad rogue I ha' been, and what I ha' had to pay for it. What I chucked away for a few pounds spent in drink and other things as bad or worse; I was not bad till then—I strove to learn and do my duty by Miss Kate, who used to like me then, and never had a unkind word. O! why did I forget all that when I listened to that man! tempting me with his cursed money that never did me good! O, if I could be as I used to

be! O, if I could!" Jim turned round, and clasping his hands together upon the top of the gate, laid his head upon them and muttered some rude earnest words, and called them prayer.

It was the letter written on behalf of Jim Perks, and bearing the impression of Hester's old love gift—well, the words are written, let them abide—that Mrs. Masham had received and which she afterwards read aloud to Ruth and Cecil:

"I am about to make a proposal to you, dear Cousin Hester, which may at first sight appear an unnecessary interference on my part in behalf of one whom we have both reason to believe has in some way assisted to do us an injury, but so many years have passed since the wrong (if any) occurred to us that I am determined to accept the good which has come to me with all thankfulness and to express my gratitude by any kindly act within my power. 'When we have lost the power to do great services to our fellow-creatures, one may at least do good-natured trifles,' says

Sir Walter Scott, and I bow my head and say 'Amen.' "

"What is he going to propose after such a preamble?" said Cecil laughing. "He could not have been more circumlocutory if he was about to offer you his hand and heart."

Mrs. Masham's face coloured all over and she had to give two or three short hems! before she could read on, and learn how Jeffery had seen Jim Perks fresh from gaol and learned his strong desire to begin a new life away from England, that needing the means he had made bold to think that if Miss Wycherly knew that he had found one other friend to back her kindly opinion of her old servant, that she would help him to work out his good resolutions. Would Miss Ruth become the poor gaolbird's advocate?"

"If this appeal should fail, Cousin Hester," Jerry's letter went on to say, "I should be much obliged if you would let me have £5 on account of the annuity so generously conferred on me, and which I cannot use better than in giving this poor fellow a chance of escaping the gallows."

"Just like Jerry Garrett!" exclaimed Mrs. Masham, "the same foolish, careless fellow that he ever was! He never valued money, and was I believe happier for losing his share of old Selwyn's property!"

Jerry was unanimously declared to be an improvident donkey, and Ruth readily undertook to communicate the contents of his letter to Kate Wycherly. Kate had but one difficulty—the consent of her father to be permitted to render the assistance required by the "incorrigible poaching scoundrel," as Mr. Wycherly had for some time designated Jim.

Kate did not despair, and she made her approaches with great caution.

"You know, papa, what Mrs. Masham told you of Mr. Garrett's good fortune" said Kate, giving a few extra stirs to her father's nightcap of grog.

"Ah, yes!" answered Wycherly. "I wonder who could have been so generous."

"So do I," said Kate quietly.

"Mrs. Masham's bound to secrecy, she says, and

so one has no right to pump her. I should like to know, I confess."

"And so should I," said Kate.

"I think I can guess!"

"And so can I," said Kate.

"Who?" asked Wycherly abruptly.

"Nobody," answered Kate, blushing very red.

"Nobody! It must be some one, that's certain, and——"

"Well, we are not permitted to enquire, papa," interrupted Kate, "and it matters very little where it comes from, so long as poor Mr. Garrett is the better for it, which he won't be."

"Won't be? what do you mean?"

And then Kate told her father all that Mr. Jerry Garrett had written, and had then to endure a great many little spurts of temper and a few rather hard and naughty words in connection with Jim Perks, but the grog, or the better nature, or the love of the foolish fond father for his darling child, overcame all objections, and full permission to act as she pleased was given at last to the diplomatic Kate.

Cecil's cure progressed very favourably, and he was enabled to go abroad, sometimes driven out by Frank, and two or three times by Mr. Wycherly, who had become, so it seemed, to regard Cecil with considerable favour.

The Lockyers had been very kind in their attentions to their injured guest, visiting him very frequently, and when business called the head of the house to town, Frank took up permanent quarters at the Rosebush and might have been considered as one of the family seeing how he invaded the sanctum at all times, and even presenting himself in the little school-room when Professor Ruth was relieved of her pupils.

If Kate Wycherly chanced to arrive before Ruth was at liberty to receive her, Frank was always ready to do the honours of the house—to hand her from her pony carriage, and conduct her to the garden door of the sanctum, through which she always entered. He carried her music and entered into the freest criticism upon the value of the different compositions, the progress of Kate's pupil Ruth, and in fact

exerted himself generally to be as agreeable as possible and quite as attentive as the lady of Old Court would permit him to be. Frank Lockyer evidently prided himself on being a lady's man, without reflecting upon the responsibilities of the character.

This pleasant life, however, was to have an end, as Cecil determined to return home as soon as he could bear the exertion of the journey. Not that he was weary of his confinement, or of the small friendly circle which was made of Kate Wycherly, Ruth, Frank and Aunt Hester, but he knew there was a lonely loving woman who longed to have him by her side again and who was not permitted to come to him. She had not told him so in any of her letters, but he knew that her love would not have left him to the care of strangers however kind and skilful they might have been, could she have ministered to his wants and alleviated his suffering.

He was right, as Hartley had told his wife, "that now she was back again he hoped she would remain and attend to her house affairs

as he wasn't going to have his many anxieties increased by looking after servants and all that and perhaps have a sick child brought home when a little motherly attention might save a long illness—he had had enough of that.”

The dutiful wife submitted quietly to her task-master and kept all his bitter sayings as secrets in her heart, never seeking to awaken the sympathy of her son by revealing them. She knew that her Cecil believed in her love for him, and in that belief she bore patiently, almost contentedly, the lot which had been assigned her.

On the day preceding Cecil's return home, he and Ruth and Frank Lockyer had accepted Mr. Wycherly's invitation to an early dinner at Old Court, and the party had been as pleasant as could have been expected under the circumstances. They had all been brought together strangely enough, but a feeling of regret at the approaching separation could not fail to intrude itself and occasionally cast a shade upon the pleasant gathering. Such shadows as these came and passed almost unnoticed—certainly by Mr. Wy-

cherly, who, when they were all assembled in the dining-room in the early evening, displayed an amount of animal spirits quite unusual with him, except when he had undergone some great anxiety and from which he had obtained a welcome relief. Could he have been only acting a friendly bearing towards Cecil in accordance with his promise to Kate, and was he now glad that the play was ending? It might be so. Wycherly had a perverse nature as well as an honest one, and his contempt for Selwyn Hartley was ineradicable. Cecil was that man's son, and a guest at Old Court by compulsion.

Music was, of course, the chief amusement of the evening, Cecil lying on the sofa being the only non-executant, as even Mr. Wycherly volunteered his co-operation, being occasionally out of time and frequently out of tune, but he only exposed himself to very tolerant critics.

Poor Cecil, as he looked at the choristers and heard their cheerful harmony, thought of another home where such grateful accessories might have obtained also, but for one who made discord of

his own life and of those committed to his charge.

Kate had sung, and Ruth had sung, and Frank Lockyer had been invited to take the place at the piano, by whose side Ruth was sitting.

“With pleasure,” said Frank in answer to the invitation, “I will try a ballad I heard some time ago if I can remember it. The words are simple enough, but the air is the composition of one of our most graceful song-writers. I think you will like it if I do not spoil it by my indifferent singing.”

He struck a few chords on the instrument, and then looking at Ruth as though he addressed himself to her, sung the following homely

BALLAD.

Say, wilt thou be my bride, Kathleen,

Though lowly I may be ?

My only wealth is this poor heart,

Which beats alone for thee ;

The gems that others bring, Kathleen,

Upon thy breast to shine,

Oh ! do they speak of love and truth
Like this poor gift of mine ?
I've not rich robes for thee, Kathleen,
Thy beauty needs no dress :
The pride of queenly splendour fades
Before thy loveliness ;
I have no banquet hall, Kathleen,
To grace thy bridal day ;
But I've a heart where thou wilt live
Till life shall pass away.

When he had ended, Ruth rose and seated herself by the side of Kate without speaking a word. Kate took her friend's hand and pressed it gently, but gentle as was the pressure of her small, soft fingers, it forced a crimson blush into the face of Ruth.

What did that wordless commentary imply that it should have received such a maidenly reproof ? Or what chord had answered to that touch to vibrate through the life, perhaps, of both those youthful friends ? To record such incidents may seem to be waste of ink and paper, but how slight a touch will darken the shadows or increase the light on the painter's canvas. Our story is only word-painting.

The party broke up soon after, evidently to the relief of Ruth, who remained at Old Court, whilst Cecil and Frank, happily unconscious of the future which that night would help to influence for good and ill, returned to the Rosebush.

As Cecil was to leave on the morrow, Frank insisted upon continuing the evening festivities in Mrs. Masham's sanctum, nor did their hostess seek to close the sitting until nearly midnight, as she was loth to part from one of her guests whom she now regarded almost with the affection due to her assumed relationship, and which Cecil was to increase more and more as time moved onward.

CHAPTER XII.

CECIL GAINS AN INSIGHT INTO HIS FATHER'S
MODE OF DOING BUSINESS, AND AFTERWARDS
MAKES A VOYAGE TO AMERICA.

CECIL had so arranged the time of his return, that he and his mother had some hours of sweet converse together before Mr. Selwyn Hartley came home from the City. As the near advent of that gentleman approached, Cecil discovered how changed his mother seemed from what she had been when they parted only four short weeks before, and he readily divined who and what had worked the transformation. It was with some effort that he compelled himself to assume the appearance of respect which he considered that filial duty demanded from him when his father entered the room.

“Well, Cecil, my boy,” said Mr. Hartley, in his

cheeriest manner; "a pretty mess you have been making of it since we said good-bye to each other. Breaking legs and all that, and, by Jove, it has pulled you down and no mistake. Oh! ah!" observing Cecil's extended hand, "how are you after your journey? None the worse, I hope."

"I hope not," replied Cecil, very little disturbed by the singularity of his reception, "I am fatigued, of course, nothing more."

"Yes, of course you are, and you won't be strong again for some time I shouldn't wonder, and just as I could have made you of use to me. But I must put up with that for the present, and"—looking at his watch—"only ten minutes to dinner, just time to wash my hands and put on a clean collar—dress for dinner, as I call it,"—and then the affectionate father left the room.

Cecil looked after him with a saddened face, not thinking so much of himself as of that gentle mother who had lived so many years in the icy coldness of the place which should have been a home. Selwyn Hartley called it by that name, but he had long since driven from it all the gentle

influences which might have blessed his dwelling-place, and have made him less accountable for duties neglected and wickedness committed.

Mr. Selwyn Hartley restrained any curiosity he might have felt as to his son's absence and recovery, until he had dined and settled himself to his satisfaction before the fire, as was his custom whenever he expected to make himself more than usually disagreeable, or to provoke remarks which might not be very acceptable to himself.

"Well, now, tell me, who have you seen since you have been away? Your mother has been alternately in the sulks or the dumps ever since her return, and I never care to interfere with her when that's the case."

Cecil looked angrily at his father, but the mute appeal for forbearance which his mother made to him, silenced the sharp answer already on his tongue.

"There were the Lockyers, of course," continued Mr. Hartley, sipping his wine. "You ought to have tried 'em on about those cottons. I got out of that lot very well after all, con-

sidering they tumbled down a penny a yard the week after I sold 'em—well, there were the Lockyers—Rebecca, just see if that window's closed, I fancy I feel a draught somewhere—and then put some coals on."

Cecil could not spare his patient mother the performance of these commands, but his pale face flushed visibly when she chided his indignation with a smile.

"That'll do ! that'll do ! I don't want to be roasted," said Mr. Hartley, drawing back his chair a little way from the fire. "Coals are coals just now, I can tell you, and—well, who else did you meet ?"

Cecil almost ground his teeth together as he said emphatically—"Mr. Wycherly, of Old Court, sir,"—and so marked was the expression of the words, that Mr. Selwyn Hartley paused in the act of drinking his third glass of sherry, and almost ventured to look at his son, but recovering his self-possession instantly, he continued seated as he had been, and exclaimed angrily, "Rebecca ! you never told me you had seen Mr. What's-his-name !"

"You never inquired whom I had seen, Selwyn," replied the wife.

"Of course I didn't, if you did not choose to tell me without," said Mr. Hartley, assuming the tone of an injured man, "but I understand your silence now—fully—quite!" That fellow Wycherly never had a good word for me in his life, and I wonder he had the civility to receive my son."

"He did not know that I was your son until after our introduction," answered Cecil spitefully.

"Oh, he didn't! eh? And do you mean by that to imply that he wouldn't have known you had it been otherwise?" asked Hartley snappishly.

"I think it very probable," replied Cecil coolly, and averting his eyes from his mother.

"Oh, you do! then I suppose you heard something to my—I would say that backbiting old fellow abused me to my own son," said Hartley, fidgeting about in his chair, and then poking the fire.

"No, sir—he never mentioned your name to me," replied Cecil. "It was Mrs. Masham of the Rosebush who led me to infer that you and Mr. Wycherly were not on friendly terms."

"Mrs. Masham!" cried Hartley, turning round at last. "You don't mean to say that you and your mother there have been staying all this time in the house of Hester Masham?"

"Why not, sir?" asked Cecil, looking his father full in the face.

"And why was I not told of it?" asked Hartley, directing his eyes upon his wife.

"Because," answered Cecil, "my condition and whereabouts seem to have been partly forgotten among your business anxieties."

"Forgotten, sir! What do you mean by that?" asked Hartley. "Haven't I sent you money—that is, your mother has, which is all the same, regularly, and written twice or three times a week? Which was it, Rebecca—three times a week you wrote?"

"For all which consideration I am sincerely grateful, and should, I confess, have been more so

if you had sent me a few fatherly sentences. But pray let us have no altercation." His mother had again mutely appealed to him.

"Very well! so be it—only I should like to know what those ungrateful connexions of mine have said behind my back." Cecil was silent. "I see they have been saying something about me, and I can guess what it is pretty well. They behaved badly to me!" and here Mr. Hartley dashed his hand violently on the table. "They would have cheated me out of my inheritance—my mess of porridge I may say—but I was too sharp for them. Had they treated me with proper respect—that old Wycherly particularly—I shouldn't have pressed Masham and Garrett to pay me my own. They tried to frighten me with big words—to bully me—they threatened me with law! Why didn't they do it? Answer me that! No—they didn't dare to face a British jury—an intelligent British jury—though my lawyer told 'em we were ready to meet 'em and swear to the truth of our allegations."

"The irrevocable past can only be regretted,

father," said Cecil; "but we have the future for atonement."

"Very well! Let them atone then to me for their slanders, and then—and then, what do ye call it," replied Hartley, again facing the fire. "Let 'em own they were wrong, and I don't mind shaking hands with my relations—not old Wycherly, mind. He threatened to kick me down-stairs on one occasion, and I have always believed and shall believe to my dying day that he would have done it, if I hadn't prevented him by not going near him."

Cecil blushed to hear this confession from one whose blood ran in his own veins.

"No—one word for all, Rebecca and Cecil," said Mr. Hartley, poker in hand. "I desire that neither of you hold communication of any sort with those down there. I never thought Cecil would have stopped more than a week with the Lockyers, or that they had any acquaintance, being such new comers, or I shouldn't have let him gone. But the mistake has been made and can't be unmade. The what's-a-name past is—you

understand—but for the time to come, I forbid either of you to mention in my hearing anything about those people, and I won't have you talk about them between yourselves—now mind that. Rebecca, I'm going to bed, and it's time that you and Cecil went also. Good night."

And both mother and son felt greatly relieved when they heard the master of the house close his dressing-room door with a bang, although the noise was an indication that Mr. Hartley was seeking his couch in a state of temper not properly conducive to calm repose.

"Cecil," said Mrs. Hartley, "I can hardly approve of all which has passed between you and your father."

"I know you cannot, my dear mother," replied Cecil. "I know that you would bear without a murmur any indignity which he might put upon you—I will try and be as patient for your sake. This little thunderstorm has cleared the air, and I am greatly relieved by getting rid of the 'perilous stuff' pent up in my bosom. I should have felt I was always acting the hypocrite

whilst allowing my father to remain in ignorance altogether of the miserable knowledge I have obtained, and"—he was about to add—"and which will throw a shadow over my future life," but remembering who was his auditor he left the words unspoken.

"Do not be alarmed for the future, dear mother," he continued after a pause, "we shall never resume the painful subject of to-night again. Depend upon that. My father will not desire it, and I will avoid it ; so kiss me, and good night."

Selwyn Hartley ! Selwyn Hartley ! you parried and thrust adroitly enough, but you have retired from the fight wounded sorely and crest-fallen before your own son. Sleep as you may.

Cecil was right in supposing that his father would never willingly revert to Hilltown and those connected with it, and Mr. Hartley was such an artist at concealing his emotions that for the next few weeks he was almost hilarious, and certainly more happy, apparently, than a man with an evil conscience ought to have been.

"Cecil, my dear boy," he said, one morning after

breakfast, "how is that leg of yours? Quite right again, I hope?"

"As right as it will ever be, I fear," replied Cecil. "It was thought to have been skilfully set, but some displacement has occurred, and I am a cripple for life.

"Dear me! dear me! But you walk with only a slight limp! Not quite dot and go one!" said the sympathetic father laughing.

"Exactly," replied Cecil, "but a slight limp is hardly to be desired by a man of two-and-twenty. However I am philosopher enough not to repine. 'What cannot be cured must be endured.'"

"That's a capital motto—one of my guides through life," said Mr. Hartley. "What do you say to coming with me to the City? You've been idle too long, some of my friends say, but I saw that you were cutting in to a good connexion for yourself, and I didn't consider that as time lost, besides, I like 'em to think that I could afford it—the proud beggars. But business now, if you please, and I should like you to come to the City with me every day."

"Yes, with pleasure," said Cecil, but the words and the tone in which they were uttered were sadly discordant.

"Well, then, we'll be off—ten to nine—late this morning, Mrs.—my dear! Not altogether your fault, as we've been talking. Now, Cecil, I've sent for a cab, and here it is, if you're ready." Mr. Hartley got into the cab first, leaving his lame son to follow.

"Tell cabby to push on, Cecil, and say I'll give him an extra fourpenny-bit if he makes haste."

Cecil delivered this communication to the cabman with the best grace he could command, and was rather disconcerted when the driver touched his hat and enquired with a smile "if he was to have all that at once." Cabby evidently knew Mr. Hartley, and had no very high estimate of his present generosity. Hartley would spend money freely enough at times, but then he would have "value received," as he called it, and never believed that he had that just equivalent out of a cabman. Perhaps he was right in that conclusion.

When they had arrived at the warehouse in the City, Mr. Hartley became a man of importance. The porters and warehousemen bowed as he passed them on his way to the counting-house at the further end of the building. Writing tables neatly arranged, iron safes opened, displayed quite a library of ledgers and day books, and two or three cash boxes were rather conspicuously exhibited. A speaking-pipe, the mouth-piece attached to Mr. Hartley's chair, appeared to communicate with a room or cellar beneath the counting-house, and when Mr. Hartley had examined his letters he called down the tube for "Mr. Bosbury!"

"I am about to introduce you, Cecil, to our principal assistant, and——Oh! here is Mr. Bosbury."

A closely cropped head, dark eyebrows, small whiskers, keen black eyes, pale complexion, and irregular teeth, gave rather a Mephistophelean *ensemble* to the gentleman bearing the name of Bosbury, who had been summoned by his principal from the lower regions of the establishment.

“Mr. Cecil, my son—Mr. Bosbury, my buyer,” said Mr. Hartley; “may you be better known to each other.” Cecil and Bosbury bowed and smiled in the usual way. “Mr. Cecil”—when in business Mr. Hartley always Mistered everybody, especially his own people, whom it must be confessed seemed to be rather a “shady lot”—“Mr. Cecil—Mr. Bosbury will excuse me, I am sure, in saying what I do—it has been one of the most fortunate accidents of my life that I have known this gentleman, for if the commercial world has reason to be proud of any of its members that member is Mr. Bosbury.”

Mr. Bosbury merely closed his eyes and bowed. He had heard the same panegyric pronounced upon himself too often to be moved by it. He knew what the words really meant.

“Mr. Bosbury, you must lunch with us here at one,” said Mr. Hartley, as though he were uttering a royal command, and so his dependent received it, as he only bowed again and prepared to leave the counting-house.

“Tell Mr. Jones I want him, if you please, Mr.

Bosbury," said Mr. Hartley, adding to Cecil—"Our principal clerk and cashier—such a treasure!"

Mr. Jones was a very wizened, hawk-eyed, snub-nosed person, and appeared sharp enough to add up the pounds, shillings, and pence columns at one operation.

"My son, Mr. Cecil," said Hartley—Mr. Jones, formerly of Rothschild Brothers' and other distinguished firms in this great city—and, I may add, every way worthy the confidence of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England. A man, Mr. Cecil, that you might trust at midnight in the bullion cellars and feel no anxiety for the safety of 'the Rest.'"

Mr. Jones spread out his little hands on either side of him—not very unlike a medieval saint on a missal—and turning up the whites of his eyes uttered a short prayer to the effect that he might never abuse the confidence reposed in him by his employers, but might be entitled to have said of him that he was faithful to the end.

"Amen!" said Mr. Hartley rather sharply, as he

had heard Mr. Jones's supplication on many similar occasions. "You will lunch with us at one if you please, Mr. Jones," and the head clerk and cashier having grinned his submission, left Mr. Hartley's private counting-house.

Mr. Hartley then applied himself to the perusal of his correspondence, after giving Cecil the Post Office Directory to amuse him, intimating that under "Merchants" he would find the parental firm of Hartley, Jobling & Co.

"Jobling & Co.?" said Cecil, "I did not know that you had partners."

"Nor have I, my boy," replied Hartley proudly, "every stick and stock about this place is your father's, Cecil, and all paid for, every scurrick. No, 'I am myself alone,' as Julius Cæsar says, but a firm always sounds so much more respectable I fancy than a oner, though Selwyn Hartley wouldn't sound bad in the market." Selwyn Hartley had a bad sound in London city, and well its owner knew it, therefore he had attached to it Jobling & Co.

Cecil was not pleased with his morning's visit

to his father's place of business nor with subsequent experiences when he came to know more of Mr. Bosbury, the pride of commerce, and Mr. Jones, the perfect treasure. Perhaps it may be as well to justify Cecil in his disapproval of their mode of conducting the business of Hartley, Jobling & Co.

Mr. Bosbury one morning invited Mr. Cecil to accompany him to his department under the counting-house, and Cecil was surprised to find that it was limited to a very small room, lighted by gas, having no other communication apparently with the outer world than a pigeon-hole just large enough to admit a man's hand. A desk and stool for Mr. Bosbury, and a broken rush-bottomed chair for any distinguished visitor, like Cecil, was all the furniture in this singular "department."

"I'm afraid you are either too late or too early, Mr. Cecil, to see any good business done to-day," said Mr. Bosbury, "but as money is very tight in the City we may have a nibble."

Cecil was quite at a loss to understand what

was meant, so he resolved to wait patiently for its solution.

"There's some one coming down the steps," said Mr. Bosbury, applying his eye to what might have been a gimlet hole. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Chuckleford, is it. Twice in a fortnight!—you must be pretty hard up for money, that's certain." These observations were delivered as a soliloquy.

Presently a piece of paper was presented through the pigeon-hole by some person outside, and Bosbury beckoned Cecil to come and inspect it. It was an invoice of certain goods sold by a country manufacturer to Mr. Chuckleford, and amounted to £195. The goods were advised to be coming per rail, and would be delivered on the following morning. Mr. Bosbury winked wickedly at Cecil, and wrote in pencil on the invoice "£95," and then, through the pigeon-hole, returned the invoice to the unknown without.

"Oh no! that won't do at all!" said a voice. "More than a hundred per cent. off! Bankruptcy is better than that," and a foot was heard slowly

ascending the stairs leading into the street at the back of the warehouse.

"Is it ? and isn't it ?" said Bosbury, with a fiendish chuckle. "Not much matter to you I fancy, Mr. Chuckleford. I suppose, Mr. Cecil, you are up to what I've been doing ?"

"No, Mr. Bosbury, I certainly am not," answered Cecil.

"Oh ! I thought the governor might have let you into our secrets a little ; but as he has asked me to bring you to my department, I suppose he don't like entering you himself, and so has handed you over to me. Hark ! here's Chucky coming back, I'll lay a hundred," and having satisfied himself of the correctness of his conjecture by peeping through the hole, he rubbed his hands and winked at Cecil, adding "All right."

"Well, I've come back," said the voice. "You must make it an even hundred, and the goods shall be here by eleven to-morrow."

Bosbury made no reply, but erasing the figures £95 with his pencil substituted £100, and placed

the invoice on a file. He then wrote, "All right, £100," on another slip of paper and passed it through the pigeon-hole to the person outside.

"There now, that transaction is complete as far as I am concerned, Mr. Cecil, and will explain itself. That man brought me that invoice of goods bought—amount, one-nine-five. He wants money—hard up, in fact, and brings the invoice to me. I offer nine-five. He springs a fiver, and I give a hundred. Do you see, sir?"

"I think I do," answered Cecil, astounded at the man's coolness.

"Very well. To-morrow the goods reach London—are then forwarded to us—if according to invoice the money will be forthcoming after Mr. Jones has worked the oracle in his department."

"What may working the oracle mean?" asked Cecil.

"Oh! it's very simple. Party goes to be paid and cheques are never given in such cases, so the word is *cash*. Very well, cash it is, but Jones

pays in country notes where there's no London agent ; the party can't get them changed without payment of a shilling, and not always then. Then Mr. Jones uses his judgment—if party is very pressing, Jones rubs off a shilling in the pound, if not, Jones gets as much as he can. The plan's ingenious, and works well, very well," and Mr. Bosbury's face expressed the sublimest contentment.

When Cecil returned to his father's room he was glad to find he had gone out, for Mr. Bosbury's revelation had so distressed, so disgusted his young principal, that he required some time for reflection before he could determine upon the course of action which it was his duty to adopt. That he could ever be a consenting party to such nefarious proceedings he knew to be impossible if he knew himself ; but how to communicate his impressions of what he had seen and heard to his father was a subject of grave anxiety. He had one friend of whom he could take counsel—Frank Lockyer—but there was something so humiliating in the statement which he would have to make, that he

paused more than once on the way to Frank's place of business, irresolute as to the propriety of the exposure, even to such a true friend. He must confide in some one, he felt, or he must leave home without a word, and then his mother—— He would see Frank.

The narrative was briefly given, but with burning cheeks and averted eye.

“And now, Frank, what am I to do? I cannot stay longer in that man's house. I will not be a partner in his dishonest business. What shall I do to live? I partly guess why I have been left idle so long, and bitterly do I regret that so much of my youth has been wasted. What shall I do?”

Frank took Cecil's hand before he replied to him.

“My dear old fellow, you are thinking and acting like your own noble self. You have not much surprised me by what you have disclosed to me. Such matters are never quite hidden from the light, and there are others, I regret to say, as bad as——”

“My father,” added Cecil. “I am sorry to hear it.”

“For yourself, Cecil, something shall be done. I have the right to say that. Perhaps only a clerkship for a time, but I shall soon be admitted into partnership with my father, and then I can help you on, old boy ! The most difficult part of the case is your mother.”

“No. I thought at first that it would be, but upon reflection I am sure she would suspect and approve my motive ; and I know how much more she would desire that I should live an honest man than a rich one.”

So it was arranged that as Cecil was desirous to avoid another altercation at home, he should inform his mother that he intended to dine and sleep at Frank Lockyer’s.

Mr. Bosbury was a keen fellow—keen as he looked, and he had not failed to discover that Mr. Cecil was too unsophisticated, too much of a gentleman to take kindly to the “job-lot” business, especially as conducted by Hartley, Jobling & Co., and their representatives, and Mr. Bosbury com-

municated his impressions to the governor during their usual afternoon's review of the day's proceedings.

It could hardly be said that Mr. Hartley was surprised at this communication, and he did not despair of removing Cecil's scruples when they came to discuss the matter together.

"Slept at Lockyer's last night, eh, Cecil?" said Hartley in the morning when his son entered the private counting-house; "a capital house of business that, and could be made very useful to us."

"I fancy you are mistaken, sir," replied Cecil. "Their mode of conducting business is very different from yours, if I am to judge by what I saw yesterday."

"Oh yes!" said Hartley, "Lockyers are pure merchants, merely merchants. Consignors and consignees—commission agents, as it were. Now we are absolute buyers and sellers, making our profits by the exercise of our knowledge and judgment and acquaintance with the markets."

"Pardon me, sir," said Cecil, "but from what I

saw yesterday your profits seem to be made from a far more questionable source. Are you aware of the business transacted in Mr. Bosbury's department ?”

“ Perfectly so,” replied Hartley folding his hands together and looking Cecil calmly in the face. “ Perfectly so. Parties bring goods for sale and Mr. Bosbury buys them if he considers they will suit our clients.”

“ And also without regard as to the manner in which the goods are procured ?” added Cecil.

“ Not so : Mr. B. knows that they are made by certain manufacturers, and therefore they are worth their money,” said Hartley mildly.

“ That is not my meaning,” replied Cecil. “ I know that he has that knowledge, and that he is also aware that he buys them in an irregular manner, and at prices which must ruin the seller and rob the honest creditor.”

“ Mr. Bosbury has nothing, my dear boy, to do with other people's business. He buys what is offered, and there his responsibility ends,” said Hartley showing his teeth.

“I think very differently, sir,” rejoined Cecil warmly. “I think that the course pursued by—well, Mr. Bosbury,—is another most cowardly way of receiving stolen goods.”

“Not from a commercial point of view,” replied Hartley, not moved in the least. “No, I assure you that you speak from your utter ignorance of the first principles of commerce—buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest. Mr. Bosbury is the most respected man in his trade.”

“And so was Dick Turpin!” said Cecil, stung out of patience by his father’s coolness and defence of his dishonest dealing.

“Ha! ha! poor Bosbury compared to Dick Turpin, with his cocked hat, big boots, and horse-pistols! I wonder what you say of me?” asked Hartley ironically.

“That you are the husband of my dear mother——”

“And your father, Cecil, don’t forget that, if you please, as I’ve no wish to have a row with you. Just think for a few days over the matter. If

you're fool enough to give away such a golden goose as I have reared up, for any of your nonsensical notions of—what shall I call it—fastidiousness—yes, that's the word—why, well and good. I won't play the cruel father, and chain you up in Mr. Bosbury's department. No; if you won't go my way you can go your own—that is, if you've any other business in view than being the gentleman, and I'm afraid you haven't got capital enough for that."

"You offer fairly enough, sir," replied Cecil, not perceiving quite clearly the drift of his father's observations, "I will think over my position and advise with you as to my future."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," said Hartley again showing his teeth.

"And perhaps, sir, until I have decided upon what my future is to be, you will not mention my objection to follow your business to my mother."

"Not likely, Cecil, I never trouble her with any business matters, depend upon it. She's got her own affairs to attend to, and would make them

much more agreeable to herself and to me if she wouldn't snivel and sulk over them quite so much as she does. However, I make some allowance for her ; the loss of the little ones, and a slight tendency to consumption I've always said, in herself, may have changed some of her sweetness into vinegar. No ; I'll not say anything to her, depend on't."

Cecil's choice was soon made, and two or three days after the preceding conversation, he announced to his father his wish to resign any pretensions to a part in the "job lot" business, as he preferred to accept a clerkship in the house of the Lockyers.

"A clerkship at Lockyer's," said Mr. Hartley contemptuously, "and so, after all that I've paid for school bills, tailor's bills, doctor's bills, and every other kind of bill, the flower of the family, as your stupid mother calls you, is content to perch himself upon a high stool for fifteen bob a-week ! O Cecil, Cecil ! you've brought your pigs to a fine market !"

"An honest one, at any rate," replied Cecil,

"and I hope that some day you will think I have chosen wisely."

"I hope I shall never be such a fool as that, Cecil. A clerk to Lockyer! And finely they'd chuckle in the trade to know that young Hartley, who was such a swell with the Surrey, is down to a second clerk. Oh no, my boy. That won't suit my book, nor yours either, depend upon it. Come, I thought how you would decide after what Mr. Bosbury told me, and so I have something to propose rather more to your advantage than your friend Lockyer's fifteen bob's worth. As you won't join me, I think if I give you two thousand pounds to start with, I do a father's part."

"Two thousand pounds!" said Cecil in surprise.

"Yes, and in case you think mine all dirty money, you may be glad to know that you've got to earn it before you touch it. Old Philcher, my late partner, has just discovered that a runaway debtor of his in America is able to pay if he is looked up. The debt is over £4,000, without

interest, and I have proposed that you should go over to New York; and if you recover the money you shall have half. Philcher agrees to that, and I will pay all preliminary expenses. Will you go?"

"I will," said Cecil, without a moment's hesitation, the money influencing his decision less than the novelty of the journey.

Frank Lockyer was delighted at the prospects of his friend, and surprised rather at the liberality of the remuneration which he was to receive. He would not have been had he known all the truth. Hartley did not care, for his own sake, to quarrel with Cecil, nor did he think it advisable to allow his son to take a clerkship in any house but his own, and this debt of Old Philcher's turned up most opportunely. Hartley, and not Philcher, had obtained the information as to the solvency of the old debtor, and by the exercise of his undoubted tact Mr. Hartley proved too cunning for his old partner, and bought the debt of him for one thousand pounds, payable when the money should be recovered. Philcher believed that

Hartley was sending good money after bad, and so it was diamond cut diamond.

As Cecil had only one matter of business to arrange, and that with Aunt Hester, he was soon ready for his departure, and having fully impressed his mother with the belief that a sea voyage was absolutely necessary for the perfect restoration of his health, he bade his friends adieu with a lighter heart than he had known since the ice frolic at Old Court.

When the ship was well at sea, Cecil was walking that part of the deck usually assigned to the second class passengers, and so continued to occupy himself until the evening closed in. He was thinking over the past few months of his life and the changes which had come with them, when he was startled by an incident most simple in itself. One of the steerage passengers had, by the cook's permission, gone into the galley to warm some broth of which he had need, having left a hospital to come aboard. In order to raise the nearly extinguished fire, the man, with his mouth, blew the coals into a glow.

As the light fell upon his face, Cecil recalled feature by feature those of the poacher he had seen in Pemberton Wood when lighted up so strangely by the flash of his gun.

END OF VOL. I.



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